











THE  
RING AND THE BOOK.

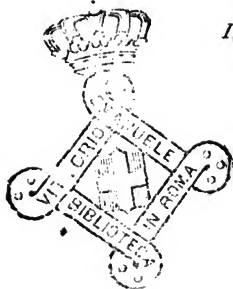
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# THE RING AND THE BOOK.

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## X.

### THE POPE.

LIKE to Ahasuerus, that shrewd prince,  
I will begin,—as is, these seven years now,  
My daily wont,—and read a History  
(Written by one whose deft right hand was dust  
To the last digit, ages ere my birth) 5  
Of all my predecessors, Popes of Rome :  
For though mine ancient early dropped the pen,  
Yet others picked it up and wrote it dry,  
Since of the making books there is no end.  
And so I have the Papacy complete 10  
From Peter first to Alexander last ;  
Can question each and take instruction so.

Have I to dare,—I ask, how dared this Pope?  
To suffer? Suchanone, how suffered he?  
Being about to judge, as now, I seek 15  
How judged once, well or ill, some other Pope;  
Study some signal judgment that subsists  
To blaze on, or else blot, the page which seals  
The sum up of what gain or loss to God  
Came of His one more Vicar in the world. 20  
So, do I find example, rule of life;  
So, square and set in order the next page,  
Shall be stretched smooth o'er my own funeral cyst.

Eight hundred years exact before the year  
I was made Pope, men made Formosus Pope, 25  
Say Sigebert and other chroniclers.  
Ere I confirm or quash the Trial here  
Of Guido Franceschini and his friends,  
Read,—How there was a ghastly Trial once  
Of a dead man by a live man, and both, Popes : 30  
Thus—in the antique penman's very phrase.

“ Then Stephen, Pope and seventh of the name,  
“ Cried out, in synod as he sat in state,  
“ While choler quivered on his brow and beard,

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“ ‘ Come into court, Formosus, thou lost wretch, 35  
“ ‘ That claimedst to be late the Pope as I !’

“ And at the word, the great door of the church  
“ Flew wide, and in they brought Formosus’ self,  
“ The body of him, dead, even as embalmed  
“ And buried duly in the Vatican 40  
“ Eight months before, exhumed thus for the nonce.  
“ They set it, that dead body of a Pope,  
“ Clothed in pontific vesture now again,  
“ Upright on Peter’s chair as if alive.

“ And Stephen, springing up, cried furiously 45  
“ ‘ Bishop of Porto, wherefore didst presume  
“ ‘ To leave that see and take this Roman see,  
“ ‘ Exchange the lesser for the greater see,  
“ ‘ —A thing against the canons of the Church ?’

“ Then one—(a Deacon who, observing forms, 50  
“ Was placed by Stephen to repel the charge,  
“ Be advocate and mouthpiece of the corpse)—  
“ Spoke as he dared, set stammeringly forth  
“ With white lips and dry tongue,—as but a youth,  
“ For frightful was the corpse-face to behold,— 55

“ How nowise lacked there precedent for this.

“ But when, for his last precedent of all,

“ Emboldened by the Spirit, out he blurts

“ ‘ And, Holy Father, didst not thou thyself

“ ‘ Vacate the lesser for the greater see, 60

“ ‘ Half a year since change Arago for Rome?’

“ ‘ —Ye have the sin’s defence now, synod mine !’

“ Shrieks Stephen in a beastly froth of rage :

“ ‘ Judge now betwixt him dead and me alive !

“ ‘ Hath he intruded or do I pretend ? 65

“ ‘ Judge, judge !’—breaks wavelike one whole foam of  
wrath.

“ Whereupon they, being friends and followers,

“ Said ‘ Ay, thou art Christ’s Vicar, and not he !

“ ‘ Away with what is frightful to behold !

“ This act was uncanonic and a fault.’ 70

“ Then, swallowed up in rage, Stephen exclaimed

“ ‘ So, guilty ! So, remains I punish guilt !

“ ‘ He is unpoped, and all he did I damn :

“ ‘ The Bishop, that ordained him, I degrade :

“ ‘ Depose to laics those he raised to priests : 75

“ ‘ What they have wrought is mischief nor shall stand,  
“ ‘ It is confusion, let it vex no more !  
“ ‘ Since I revoke, annul and abrogate  
“ ‘ All his decrees in all kinds : they are void !  
“ ‘ In token whereof and warning to the world, 80  
“ ‘ Strip me yon miscreant of those robes usurped,  
“ ‘ And clothe him with vile serge befitting such !  
“ ‘ Then hale the carrion to the market-place ;  
“ ‘ Let the town-hangman chop from his right hand  
“ ‘ Those same three fingers which he blessed withal ; 85  
“ ‘ Next cut the head off, once was crowned forsooth :  
“ ‘ And last go fling them, fingers, head and trunk,  
“ ‘ To Tiber that my Christian fish may sup ! ’  
“ — Either because of ΙΧΘΥΣ which means Fish  
“ And very aptly symbolizes Christ, 90  
“ Or else because the Pope is Fisherman,  
“ And seals with Fisher’s-signet.

“ Anyway,

“ So said, so done : himself, to see it done,  
“ Followed the corpse they trailed from street to street  
“ Till into Tiber wave they threw the thing. 96  
“ The people, crowded on the banks to see,  
“ Were loud or mute, wept or laughed, cursed or jeered,

- “ According as the deed addressed their sense ;  
“ A scandal verily : and out spake a Jew 100  
“ ‘ Wot ye your Christ had vexed our Herod thus ? ’
- “ Now when, Formosus being dead a year,  
“ His judge Pope Stephen tasted death in turn,  
“ Made captive by the mob and strangled straight,  
“ Romanus, his successor for a month, 105  
“ Did make protest Formosus was with God,  
“ Holy, just, true in thought and word and deed.  
“ Next Theodore, who reigned but twenty days,  
“ Therein convoked a synod, whose decree  
“ Did reinstate, repope the late unpoped, 110  
“ And do away with Stephen as accursed.  
“ So that when presently certain fisher-folk  
“ (As if the queasy river could not hold  
“ Its swallowed Jonas, but discharged the meal)  
“ Produced the timely product of their nets, 115  
“ The mutilated man, Formosus,—saved  
“ From putrefaction by the embalmer’s spice,  
“ Or, as some said, by sanctity of flesh,—  
“ ‘ Why, lay the body again ’ bade Theodore  
“ ‘ Among his predecessors, in the church 120  
“ ‘ And burial-place of Peter ! ’ which was done.



- “ ‘And’ addeth Luitprand ‘many of repute,  
“ ‘Pious and still alive, avouch to me  
“ ‘That, as they bore the body up the aisle,  
“ ‘The saints in imaged row bowed each his head 125  
“ ‘For welcome to a brother-saint come back.’  
“ As for Romanus and this Theodore,  
“ These two Popes, through the brief reign granted each,  
“ Could but initiate what John came to close  
“ And give the final stamp to : he it was 130  
“ Ninth of the name, (I follow the best guides)  
“ Who,—in full synod at Ravenna held  
“ With Bishops seventy-four, and present too  
“ Eude King of France with his Archbishopry,—  
“ Did condemn Stephen, anathematize 135  
“ The disinterment, and make all blots blank.  
“ ‘For,’ argueth here Auxilius in a place  
“ *De Ordinationibus*, ‘precedents  
“ ‘Had been, no lack, before Formosus long,  
“ ‘Of Bishops so transferred from see to see,— 140  
“ ‘Marinus, for example :’ read the tract.
- “ But, after John, came Sergius, reaffirmed  
“ The right of Stephen, cursed Formosus, nay  
“ Cast out, some say, his corpse a second time.

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“ And here,—because the matter went to ground, 145  
“ Fretted by new griefs, other cares of the age,—  
“ Here is the last pronouncing of the Church,  
“ Her sentence that subsists unto this day.  
“ Yet constantly opinion hath prevailed  
“ I’ the Church, Formosus was a holy man.” 150

Which of the judgments was infallible ?  
Which of my predecessors spoke for God ?  
And what availed Formosus that this cursed,  
That blessed, and then this other cursed again ?  
“ Fear ye not those whose power can kill the body 155  
“ And not the soul,” saith Christ, “ but rather those  
“ Can cast both soul and body into hell ! ”

John judged thus in Eight Hundred Ninety Eight,  
Exact eight hundred years ago to-day  
When, sitting in his stead, Vice-gerent here, 160  
I must give judgment on my own behoof.  
So worked the predecessor ! now, my turn !

In God’s name ! Once more on this earth of God’s,  
While twilight lasts and time wherein to work,  
I take His staff with my uncertain hand, 165

And stay my six and fourscore years, my due  
Labour and sorrow, on His judgment-seat,  
And forthwith think, speak, act, in place of Him—  
The Pope for Christ. Once more appeal is made  
From man's assize to mine : I sit and see 170  
Another poor weak trembling human wretch  
Pushed by his fellows, who pretend the right,  
Up to the gulf which, where I gaze, begins  
From this world to the next,—gives way and way,  
Just on the edge over the awful dark : 175  
With nothing to arrest him but my feet.  
He catches at me with convulsive face,  
Cries " Leave to live the natural minute more !"  
While hollowly the avengers echo " Leave ?  
" None ! So has he exceeded man's due share 180  
" In man's fit licence, wrung by Adam's fall,  
" To sin and yet not surely die,—that we,  
" All of us sinful, all with need of grace,  
" All chary of our life,—the minute more  
" Or minute less of grace which saves a soul,— 185  
" Bound to make common cause with who craves time,  
" —We yet protest against the exorbitance  
" Of sin in this one sinner, and demand  
" That his poor sole remaining piece of time

“ Be plucked from out his clutch : put him to death ! 190

“ Punish him now ! As for the weal or woe

“ Hereafter, God grant mercy ! Man be just,

“ Nor let the felon boast he went scot-free !”

And I am bound, the solitary judge,

To weigh the worth, decide upon the plea, 195

And either hold a hand out, or withdraw

A foot and let the wretch drift to the fall.

Ay, and while thus I dally, dare perchance

Put fancies for a comfort 'twixt this calm

And yonder passion that I have to bear,— 200

As if reprieve were possible for both

Prisoner and Pope,—how easy were reprieve !

A touch o' the hand-bell here, a hasty word

To those who wait, and wonder they wait long,

I' the passage there, and I should gain the life !— 205

Yea, though I flatter me with fancy thus,

I know it is but nature's craven-trick.

The case is over, judgment at an end,

And all things done now and irrevocable :

A mere dead man is Franceschini here, 210

Even as Formosus centuries ago.

I have worn through this sombre wintry day,

With winter in my soul beyond the world's,

---

Over these dismalest of documents  
Which drew night down on me ere eve befell,— 215  
Pleadings and counter-pleadings, figure of fact  
Beside fact's self, these summaries to-wit,—  
How certain three were slain by certain five :  
I read here why it was, and how it went,  
And how the chief o' the five preferred excuse, 220  
And how law rather chose defence should lie,—  
What argument he urged by wary word  
When free to play off wile, start subterfuge,  
And what the unguarded groan told, torture's feat  
When law grew brutal, outbroke, overbore 225  
And glittered hunger on the truth, at last,—  
No matter for the flesh and blood between.  
All 's a clear rede and no more riddle now.  
Truth, nowhere, lies yet everywhere in these—  
Not absolutely in a portion, yet 230  
Evolvable from the whole : evolved at last  
Painfully, held tenaciously by me.  
Therefore there is not any doubt to clear  
When I shall write the brief word presently  
And chink the hand-bell, which I pause to do. 235  
Irresolute? Not I, more than the mound  
With the pine-trees on it yonder ! Some surmise,

Perchance, that since man's wit is fallible,  
Mine may fail here? Suppose it so,—what then?  
Say,—Guido, I count guilty, there 's no babe 240  
So guiltless, for I misconceive the man!  
What 's in the chance should move me from my mind?  
If, as I walk in a rough country-side,  
Peasants of mine cry "Thou art he can help,  
" Lord of the land and counted wise to boot: 245  
" Look at our brother, strangling in his foam,  
" He fell so where we find him,—prove thy worth!"  
I may presume, pronounce, "A frenzy-fit,  
" A falling-sickness or a fever-stroke!  
" Breathe a vein, copiously let blood at once!" 250  
So perishes the patient, and anon  
I hear my peasants—"All was error, lord!  
" Our story, thy prescription: for there crawled  
" In due time from our hapless brother's breast  
" The serpent which had stung him: bleeding slew 255  
" Whom a prompt cordial had restored to health."  
What other should I say than "God so willed:  
" Mankind is ignorant, a man am I:  
" Call ignorance my sorrow not my sin!"  
So and not otherwise, in after-time, 260  
If some acuter wit, fresh probing, sound

This multifarious mass of words and deeds  
Deeper, and reach through guilt to innocence,  
I shall face Guido's ghost nor blench a jot.  
" God who set me to judge thee, meted out 265  
" So much of judging faculty, no more :  
" Ask Him if I was slack in use thereof ! "  
I hold a heavier fault imputable  
Inasmuch as I changed a chaplain once,  
For no cause,—no, if I must bare my heart,— 270  
Save that he snuffled somewhat saying mass.  
For I am ware it is the seed of act,  
God holds appraising in His hollow palm,  
Not act grown great thence on the world below,  
Leafage and branchage, vulgar eyes admire. 275  
Therefore I stand on my integrity,  
Nor fear at all : and if I hesitate,  
It is because I need to breathe awhile,  
Rest, as the human right allows, review  
Intent the little seeds of act, my tree,— 280  
The thought, which, clothed in deed, I give the world  
At chink of bell and push of arrased door.

O pale departure, dim disgrace of day !  
Winter 's in wane, his vengeful worst art thou,

To dash the boldness of advancing March ! 285  
Thy chill persistent rain has purged our streets  
Of gossipry ; pert tongue and idle ear  
By this, consort 'neath archway, portico.  
But wheresoe'er Rome gathers in the grey,  
Two names now snap and flash from mouth to  
mouth— 290  
(Sparks, flint and steel strike) Guido and the Pope.  
By this same hour to-morrow eve—aha,  
How do they call him?—the sagacious Swede  
Who finds by figures how the chances prove,  
Why one comes rather than another thing, 295  
As, say, such dots turn up by throw of dice,  
Or, if we dip in Virgil here and there  
And prick for such a verse, when such shall point.  
Take this Swede, tell him, hiding name and rank,  
Two men are in our city this dull eve ; 300  
One doomed to death,—but hundreds in such plight  
Slip aside, clean escape by leave of law  
Which leans to mercy in this latter time ;  
Moreover in the plenitude of life  
Is he, with strength of limb and brain adroit, 305  
Presumably of service here : beside,  
The man is noble, backed, by nobler friends :



Nay, so they wish him well, the city's self  
Makes common cause with who—house-magistrate,  
Patron of hearth and home, domestic lord— 310  
But ruled his own, let aliens cavil. Die ?  
He 'll bribe a gaoler or break prison first !  
Nay, a sedition may be helpful, give  
Hint to the mob to batter wall, burn gate,  
And bid the favourite malefactor march. 315  
Calculate now these chances of escape !  
“ It is not probable, but well may be.”  
Again, there is another man, weighed now  
By twice eight years beyond the seven-times-ten,  
Appointed overweight to break our branch. 320  
And this man's loaded branch lifts, more than snow,  
All the world's cark and care, though a bird's nest  
Were a superfluous burthen : notably  
Hath he been pressed, as if his age were youth,  
From to-day's dawn till now that day departs, 325  
Trying one question with true sweat of soul  
“ Shall the said doomed man fitlier die or live ? ”  
When a straw swallowed in his posset, stool  
Stumbled on where his path lies, any puff  
That 's incident to such a smoking flax, 330  
Hurries the natural end and quenches him !

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Now calculate, thou sage, the chances here,  
Say, which shall die the sooner, this or that ?  
“ That, possibly, this in all likelihood.”  
I thought so : yet thou tripp’st, my foreign friend ! 335  
No, it will be quite otherwise,—to-day  
Is Guido’s last : my term is yet to run.

But say the Swede were right, and I forthwith  
Acknowledge a prompt summons and lie dead :  
Why, then I stand already in God’s face 340  
And hear “ Since by its fruit a tree is judged,  
“ Show me thy fruit, the latest act of thine !  
“ For in the last is summed the first and all,—  
“ What thy life last put heart and soul into,  
“ There shall I taste thy product.” I must plead 345  
This condemnation of a man to-day.

Not so ! Expect nor question nor reply  
At what we figure as God’s judgment-bar !  
None of this vile way by the barren words  
Which, more than any deed, characterize 350  
Man as made subject to a curse : no speech—  
That still bursts o’er some lie which lurks inside,  
As the split skin across the coppery snake,

And most denotes man ! since, in all beside,  
In hate or lust or guile or unbelief, 355  
Out of some core of truth the excrescence comes,  
And, in the last resort, the man may urge  
“ So was I made, a weak thing that gave way  
“ To truth, to impulse only strong since true,  
“ And hated, lusted, used guile, forwent faith.” 360  
But when man walks the garden of this world  
For his own solace, and, unchecked by law,  
Speaks or keeps silence as himself sees fit,  
Without the least incumbency to lie,  
—Why, can he tell you what a rose is like, 365  
Or how the birds fly, and not slip to false  
Though truth serve better ? Man must tell his mate  
Of you, me and himself, knowing he lies,  
Knowing his fellow knows the same,—will think  
“ He lies, it is the method of a man ! ” 370  
And yet will speak for answer “ It is truth ”  
To him who shall rejoin “ Again a lie ! ”  
Therefore these filthy rags of speech, this coil  
Of statement, comment, query and response,  
Tatters all too contaminate for use, 375  
Have no renewing : He, the Truth, is, too,  
The Word. We men, in our degree, may know

There, simply, instantaneously, as here  
After long time and amid many lies,  
Whatever we dare think we know indeed . . . 380  
—That I am I, as He is He,—what else?  
But be man's method for man's life at least!  
Wherefore, Antonio Pignatelli, thou  
My ancient self, who wast no Pope so long  
But studied God and man, the many years . . . 385  
I' the school, i' the cloister, in the diocese  
Domestic, legate-rule in foreign lands,—  
Thou other force in those old busy days  
Than this grey ultimate decrepitude,—  
Yet sensible of fires that more and more . . . 390  
Visit a soul, in passage to the sky,  
Left nakeder than when flesh-robe was new—  
Thou, not Pope but the mere old man o' the world,  
Supposed inquisitive and dispassionate,  
Wilt thou, the one whose speech I somewhat trust, . . . 395  
Question the after-me, this self now Pope,  
Hear his procedure, criticize his work?  
Wise in its generation is the world.

This is why Guido is found reprobate.  
I see him furnished forth for his career, . . . 400

On starting for the life-chance in our world,  
With nearly all we count sufficient help :  
Body and mind in balance, a sound frame,  
A solid intellect : the wit to seek,  
Wisdom to choose, and courage wherewithal 405  
To deal in whatsoever circumstance  
Should minister to man, make life succeed.  
Oh, and much drawback ! what were earth without ?  
Is this our ultimate stage, or starting-place  
To try man's foot, if it will creep or climb, 410  
'Mid obstacles in seeming, points that prove  
Advantage for who vaults from low to high  
And makes the stumbling-block a stepping-stone ?  
So, Guido, born with appetite, lacks food :  
Is poor, who yet could deftly play-off wealth : 415  
Straitened, whose limbs are restless till at large :  
He, as he eyes each outlet of the cirque  
And narrow penfold for probation, pines  
After the good things just outside its grate,  
With less monition, fainter conscience-twitch, 420  
Rarer instinctive qualm at the first feel  
Of greed unseemly, prompting grasp undue,  
Than nature furnishes her main mankind,—  
Making it harder to do wrong than right

The first time, careful lest the common ear 425  
Break measure, miss the outstep of life's march.  
Wherein I see a trial fair and fit  
For one else too unfairly fenced about,  
Set above sin, beyond his fellows here :  
Guarded from the arch-tempter, all must fight, 430  
By a great birth, traditionary name,  
Diligent culture, choice companionship,  
Above all, conversancy with the faith  
Which puts forth for its base of doctrine just  
" Man is born nowise to content himself 435  
" But please God." He accepted such a rule,  
Recognized man's obedience ; and the Church,  
Which simply is such rule's embodiment,  
He clave to, he held on by,—nay, indeed,  
Near pushed inside of, deep as layman durst, 440  
Professed so much of priesthood as might sue  
For priest's-exemption where the layman sinned,—  
Got his arm frocked which, bare, the law would bruise.  
Hence, at this moment, what 's his last resource,  
His extreme stay and utmost stretch of hope 445  
But that,—convicted of such crime as law  
Wipes not away save with a worldling's blood,—  
Guido, the three-parts consecrate, may 'scape ?

Nay, the portentous brothers of the man  
Are veritably priests, protected each 450  
May do his murder in the Church's pale,  
Abate Paul, Canon Girolamo !  
'This is the man proves irreligious  
Of all mankind, religion's parasite !  
This may forsooth plead din'd ear, jaded sense, 455  
The vice o' the watcher who bides near the bell,  
Sleeps sound because the clock is vigilant,  
And cares not whether it be shade or shine,  
Doling out day and night to all men else !  
Why was the choice o' the man to niche himself 460  
Perversely 'neath the tower where Time's own tongue  
Thus undertakes to sermonize the world ?  
Why, but because the solemn is safe too,  
The beifry proves a fortress of a sort,  
Has other uses than to teach the hour : 465  
Turns sunscreen, paravent and ombrifuge  
To whoso seeks a shelter in its pale,  
—Ay, and attractive to unwary folk  
Who gaze at storied portal, statued spire,  
And go home with full head but empty purse 470  
Nor dare suspect the sacristan the thief !  
Shall Judas,—hard upon the donor's heel,



To filch the fragments of the basket,—plead  
He was too near the preacher's mouth, nor sat  
Attent with fifties in a company ? 475  
No,—closer to promulgated decree,  
Clearer the censure of default. Proceed !

I find him bound, then, to begin life well ;  
Fortified by propitious circumstance,  
Great birth, good breeding, with the Church for guide.  
How lives he? Cased thus in a coat of proof, 481  
Mailed like a man-at-arms, though all the while  
A puny starveling,—does the breast pant big,  
The limb swell to the limit, emptiness  
Strive to become solidity indeed ? 485  
Rather, he shrinks up like the ambiguous fish,  
Detaches flesh from shell and outside show,  
And steals by moonlight (I have seen the thing)  
In and out, now to prey and now to skulk.  
Armour he boasts when a wave breaks on beach, 490  
Or bird stoops for the prize : with peril nigh,—  
The man of rank, the much-befriended man,  
The man almost affiliate to the Church,  
Such is to deal with, let the world beware !  
Does the world recognize, pass prudently ? 495



Do tides abate and sea-fowl hunt i' the deep?  
Already is the slug from out its mew,  
Ignobly faring with all loose and free,  
Sand-fly and slush-worm at their garbage-feast,  
A naked blotch no better than they all : 500  
Guido has dropped nobility, slipped the Church,  
Plays trickster if not cut-purse, body and soul  
Prostrate among the filthy feeders—faugh !  
And when Law takes him by surprise at last,  
Catches the foul thing on its carrion-prey, 505  
Behold, he points to shell left high and dry,  
Pleads “ But the case out yonder is myself ! ”  
Nay, it is thou, Law prongs amid thy peers,  
Congenial vermin ; that was none of thee,  
Thine outside,—give it to the soldier-crab ! 510

For I find this black mark impinge the man,  
That he believes in just the vile of life.  
Low instinct, base pretension, are these truth ?  
Then, that aforesaid armour, probity  
He figures in, is falsehood scale on scale ; 515  
Honor and faith,—a lie and a disguise,  
Probably for all livers in this world,  
Certainly for himself ! All say good words

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To who will hear, all do thereby bad deeds  
To who must undergo ; so thrive mankind! 520  
See this habitual creed exemplified  
Most in the last deliberate act ; as last,  
So, very sum and substance of the soul  
Of him that planned and leaves one perfect piece,  
The sin brought under jurisdiction now, 525  
Even the marriage of the man : this act  
I sever from his life as sample, show  
For Guido's self, intend to test him by,  
As, from a cup filled fairly at the fount,  
By the components we decide enough 530  
Or to let flow as late, or staunch the source.

He purposes this marriage, I remark,  
On no one motive that should prompt thereto—  
Farthest, by consequence, from ends alleged  
Appropriate to the action ; so they were : 535  
The best, he knew and feigned, the worst he took.  
Not one permissible impulse moves the man,  
From the mere liking of the eye and ear,  
To the true longing of the heart that loves,  
No trace of these : but all to instigate, 540  
Is what sinks man past level of the brute,

Whose appetite if brutish is a truth.  
All is the lust for money : to get gold,—  
Why, lie, rob, if it must be, murder ! Make  
Body and soul wring gold out, lured within 545  
The clutch of hate by love, the trap's pretence !  
What good else get from bodies and from souls ?  
This got, there were some life to lead thereby,  
—What, where or how, appreciate those who tell  
How the toad lives : it lives,—enough for me ! 550  
To get this good,—with but a groan or so,  
Then, silence of the victims,—were the feat.  
He foresaw, made a picture in his mind,—  
Of father and mother stunned and echoless  
To the blow, as they lie staring at fate's jaws 555  
Their folly danced into, till the woe fell ;  
Edged in a month by strenuous cruelty  
From even the poor nook whence they watched the wolf  
Feast on their heart, the lamb-like child his prey ;  
Plundered to the last remnant of their wealth, 560  
(What daily pittance pleased the plunderer dole)  
Hunted forth to go hide head, starve and die,  
And leave the pale awe-stricken wife, past hope  
Of help i' the world now, mute and motionless,  
His slave, his chattel, to first use, then destroy 565

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All this, he bent mind how to bring about,  
Put plain in act and life, as painted plain,  
So have success, reach crown of earthly good,  
In this particular enterprise of man,  
By marriage—undertaken in God's face 570  
With all these lies so opposite God's truth,  
For end so other than man's end.

Thus schemes

Guido, and thus would carry out his scheme :  
But when an obstacle first blocks the path, 575  
When he finds none may boast monopoly  
Of lies and trick i' the tricking lying world,—  
That sorry timid natures, even this sort  
O' the Comparini, want nor trick nor lie  
Proper to the kind,—that as the gor-crow treats 580  
The bramble-finch so treats the finch the moth,  
And the great Guido is minutely matched  
By this same couple,—whether true or false  
The revelation of Pompilia's birth,  
Which in a moment brings his scheme to nought,— 585  
Then, he is piqued, advances yet a stage,  
Leaves the low region to the finch and fly,  
Soars to the zenith whence the fiercer fowl

May dare the inimitable swoop. I see.  
He draws now on the curious crime, the fine 590  
Felicity and flower of wickedness ;  
Determines, by the utmost exercise  
Of violence, made safe and sure by craft,  
To satiate malice, pluck one last arch-pang  
From the parents, else would triumph out of reach, 595  
By punishing their child, within reach yet,  
Who, by thought, word or deed, could nowise wrong  
I' the matter that now moves him. So plans he,  
Always subordinating (note the point !)  
Revenge, the manlier sin, to interest 600  
The meaner,—would pluck pang forth, but unclench  
No gripe in the act, let fall no money-piece.  
Hence a plan for so plaguing, body and soul,  
His wife, so putting, day by day and hour by hour,  
The untried torture to the untouched place, 605  
As must precipitate an end foreseen,  
Goad her into some plain revolt, most like  
Plunge upon patent suicidal shame,  
Death to herself, damnation by rebound  
To those whose hearts he, holding hers, holds still : 610  
Such plan as, in its bad completeness, shall  
Ruin the three together and alike,

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Yet leave himself in luck and liberty,  
No claim renounced, no right a forfeiture,  
His person unendangered, his good fame 615  
Without a flaw, his pristine worth intact,—  
While they, with all their claims and rights that cling,  
Shall forthwith crumble off him every side,  
Scorched into dust, a plaything for the winds.  
As when, in our Campagna, there is fired 620  
The nest-like work that lets a peasant house;  
And, as the thatch burns here, there, everywhere,  
Even to the ivy and wild vine, that bound  
And blessed the hut where men were happy once,  
There rises gradual, black amid the blaze, 625  
Some grim and unscathed nucleus of the nest,—  
Some old malicious tower, some obscene tomb  
They thought a temple in their ignorance,  
And clung about and thought to lean upon—  
There laughs it o'er their ravage,—where are they? 630  
So did his cruelty burn life about,  
And lay the ruin bare in dreadfulnes,  
Try the persistency of torment so  
Upon the wife, that, at extremity,  
Some crisis brought about by fire and flame, 635  
The patient frenzy-stung must needs break loose,

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Fly anyhow, find refuge anywhere,  
Even in the arms of who should front her first,  
No monster but a man—while nature shrieked  
“ Or thus escape, or die ! ” The spasm arrived, 640  
Not the escape by way of sin,—O God,  
Who shall pluck sheep Thou holdest, from Thy hand ?  
Therefore she lay resigned to die,—so far  
The simple cruelty was foiled. Why then,  
Craft to the rescue, let craft supplement 645  
Cruelty and show hell a masterpiece !  
Hence this consummate lie, this love-intrigue,  
Unmanly simulation of a sin,  
With place and time and circumstance to suit—  
These letters false beyond all forgery— 650  
Not just handwriting and mere authorship,  
But false to body and soul they figure forth—  
As though the man had cut out shape and shape  
From fancies of that other Aretine,  
To paste below—incorporate the filth 655  
With cherub faces on a missal-page !

Whereby the man so far attains his end  
That strange temptation is permitted,—see !  
Pompilia, wife, and Caponsacchi, priest,

Are brought together as nor priest nor wife 660  
Should stand, and there is passion in the place,  
Power in the air for evil as for good,  
Promptings from heaven and hell, as if the stars  
Fought in their courses for a fate to be.  
Thus stand the wife and priest, a spectacle, 665  
I doubt not, to unseen assemblage there.  
No lamp will mark that window for a shrine,  
No tablet signalize the terrace, teach  
New generations which succeed the old,  
The pavement of the street is holy ground ; 670  
No bard describe in verse how Christ prevailed  
And Satan fell like lightning ! Why repine ?  
What does the world, told truth, but lie the more ?

A second time the plot is foiled ; nor, now,  
By corresponding sin for countercheck, 675  
No wile and trick that baffle trick and wile,—  
The play o' the parents ! Here the blot is blanced  
By God's gift of a purity of soul  
That will not take pollution, ermine-like  
Armed from dishonour by its own soft snow. 680  
Such was this gift of God who showed for once  
How He would have the world go white : it seems



As a new attribute were born of each  
Champion of truth, the priest and wife I praise,—  
As a new safeguard sprang up in defence 685  
Of their new noble nature : so a thorn  
Comes to the aid of and completes the rose—  
Courage to-wit, no woman's gift nor priest's,  
I' the crisis ; might leaps vindicating right.  
See how the strong aggressor, bad and bold, 690  
With every vantage, preconcerts surprise,  
Leaps of a sudden at his victim's throat  
In a byeway,—how fares he when face to face  
With Caponsacchi ? Who fights, who fears now ? 694  
There quails Count Guido, armed to the chattering teeth,  
Cowers at the steadfast eye and quiet word  
O' the Canon at the Pieve ! There skulks crime  
Behind law called in to back cowardice !  
While out of the poor trampled worm the wife,  
Springs up a serpent ! 700

But anon of these !

Him I judge now,—of him proceed to note,  
Failing the first, a second chance befriends  
Guido, gives pause ere punishment arrive.  
The law he called, comes, hears, adjudicates, 705

Nor does amiss i' the main,—secludes the wife  
From the husband, respites the oppressed one, grants  
Probation to the oppressor, could he know  
The mercy of a minute's fiery purge !

The furnace-coals alike of public scorn, 710  
Private remorse, heaped glowing on his head,  
What if,—the force and guile, the ore's alloy,  
Eliminate, his baser soul refined—

The lost be saved even yet, so as by fire?  
Let him, rebuked, go softly all his days 715  
And, when no graver musings claim their due,  
Meditate on a man's immense mistake  
Who, fashioned to use feet and walk, deigns crawl—  
Takes the unmanly means—ay, though to ends  
Man scarce should make for, would but reach thro'  
wrong,— 720

May sin, but must not needs shame manhood so :  
Since fowlers hawk, shoot, nay and snare the game,  
And yet eschew vile practice, nor find sport  
In torch-light treachery or the luring owl.

But how hunts Guido? Why, the fraudulent trap— 725  
Late spurned to ruin by the indignant feet  
Of fellows in the chase who loved fair play—

Here he picks up the fragments to the least,  
Lades him and hies to the old lurking-place  
Where haply he may patch again, refit 730  
The mischief, file its blunted teeth anew,  
Make sure, next time, first snap shall break the bone.  
Craft, greed and violence complot revenge :  
Craft, for its quota, schemes to bring about  
And seize occasion and be safe withal : 735  
Greed craves its act may work both far and near,  
Crush the tree, branch and trunk and root beside,  
Whichever twig or leaf arrests a streak  
Of possible sunshine else would coin itself,  
And drop down one more gold piece in the path : 740  
Violence stipulates " Advantage proved,  
" And safety sure, be pain the overplus !  
" Murder with jagged knife ! Cut but tear too !  
" Foiled oft, starved long, glut malice for amends ! " 744  
And what, craft's scheme ? scheme sorrowful and strange  
As though the elements, whom mercy checked,  
Had mustered hate for one eruption more,  
One final deluge to surprise the Ark  
Cradled and sleeping on its mountain-top :  
Their outbreak-signal—what but the dove's coo, 750  
Back with the olive in her bill for news

Sorrow was over? 'T is an infant's birth,  
Guido's first born, his son and heir, that gives  
The occasion : other men cut free their souls  
From care in such a case, fly up in thanks 755  
To God, reach, recognise His love for once :  
Guido cries "Soul, at last the mire is thine !  
" Lie there in likeness of a money-bag,  
" My babe's birth so pins down past moving now,  
" That I dare cut adrift the lives I late 760  
" Scrupled to touch lest thou escape with them !  
" These parents and their child my wife,—touch one  
" Lose all ! 'Their rights determined on a head  
" I could but hate, not harm, since from each hair 764  
" Dangled a hope for me : now—chance and change !  
" No right was in their child but passes now  
" To that child's child and through such child to me.  
" I am a father now,—come what, come will,  
" I represent my child ; he comes between—  
" Cuts sudden off the sunshine of this life 770  
" From those three : why, the gold is in his curls !  
" Not with old Pietro's, Violante's head,  
" Not his grey horror, her more hideous black—  
" Go these, devoted to the knife !"  
"T is done : 775

Wherefore should mind misgive, heart hesitate ?  
He calls to counsel, fashions certain four  
Colourless natures counted clean till now,  
—Rustic simplicity, uncorrupted youth,  
Ignorant virtue ! Here 's the gold o' the prime 780  
When Saturn ruled, shall shock our leaden day—  
The clown abash the courtier ! Mark it, bards !  
The courtier tries his hand on clownship here,  
Speaks a word, names a crime, appoints a price,—  
Just breathes on what, suffused with all himself, 785  
Is red-hot henceforth past distinction now  
I' the common glow of hell. And thus they break  
And blaze on us at Rome, Christ's birthnight-eve !  
Oh angels that sang erst " On the earth, peace !  
" To man, good will ! "—such peace finds earth  
to-day !  
After the seventeen hundred years, so man 791  
Wills good to man, so Guido makes complete  
His murder ! what is it I said ?—cuts loose  
Three lives that hitherto he suffered cling,  
Simply because each served to nail secure, 795  
By a corner of the money-bag, his soul,—  
Therefore, lives sacred till the babe's first breath  
O'erweights them in the balance,—off they fly !

---

So is the murder managed, sin conceived  
To the full : and why not crowned with triumph too ? 800  
Why must the sin, conceived thus, bring forth death ?  
I note how, within hair's-breadth of escape,  
Impunity and the thing supposed success,  
Guido is found when the check comes, the change,  
The monitory touch o' the tether—felt 805  
By few, not marked by many, named by none  
At the moment, only recognised aright  
I' the fulness of the days, for God's, lest sin  
Exceed the service, leap the line : such check—  
A secret which this life finds hard to keep, 810  
And, often guessed, is never quite revealed—  
Needs must trip Guido on a stumbling-block  
Too vulgar, too absurdly plain i' the path !  
Study this single oversight of care,  
This hebetude that marred sagacity, 815  
Forgetfulness of all the man best knew,—  
How any stranger having need to fly,  
Needs but to ask and have the means of flight.  
Why, the first urchin tells you, to leave Rome,  
Get horses, you must show the warrant, just 820  
The banal scrap, clerk's scribble, a fair word buys,  
Or foul one, if a ducat sweeten word,—

And straight authority will back demand,  
Give you the pick o' the post-house !—how should he,  
Then, resident at Rome for thirty years, 825  
Guido, instruct a stranger ! And himself  
Forgets just this poor paper scrap, wherewith  
Armed, every door he knocks at opens wide  
To save him : horsed and manned, with such advance  
O' the hunt behind, why, 't were the easy task 830  
Of hours told on the fingers of one hand,  
To reach the Tuscan frontier, laugh at home,  
Light-hearted with his fellows of the place,—  
Prepared by that strange shameful judgment, that  
Satire upon a sentence just pronounced 835  
By the Rota and confirmed by the Granduke,—  
Ready in a circle to receive their peer,  
Appreciate his good story how, when Rome,  
The Pope-King and the populace of priests  
Made common cause with their confederate 840  
The other priestling who seduced his wife,  
He, all unaided, wiped out the affront  
With decent bloodshed and could face his friends,  
Frolic it in the world's eye. Ay, such tale  
Missed such applause, and by such oversight ! 845  
So, tired and footsore, those blood-flustered five

Went reeling on the road through dark and cold,  
The few permissible miles, to sink at length,  
Wallow and sleep in the first wayside straw,  
As the other herd quenched, i' the wash o' the wave, 850  
—Each swine, the devil inside him : so slept they,  
And so were caught and caged—all through one trip,  
One touch of fool in Guido the astute !  
He curses the omission, I surmise,  
More than the murder. Why, thou fool and blind, 855  
It is the mercy-stroke that stops thy fate,  
Hamstrings and holds thee to thy hurt,—but how ?  
On the edge o' the precipice ! One minute more,  
Thou hadst gone farther and fared worse, my son,  
Fathoms down on the flint and fire beneath ! 860  
Thy comrades each and all were of one mind,  
Thy murder done, to straightway murder thee  
In turn, because of promised pay withheld.  
So, to the last, greed found itself at odds  
With craft in thee, and, proving conqueror, 865  
Had sent thee, the same night that crowned thy hope,  
Thither where, this same day, I see thee not,  
Nor, through God's mercy, need, to-morrow, see.

Such I find Guido, midmost blotch of black



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Discernible in this group of clustered crimes 870  
Huddling together in the cave they call  
Their palace, outraged day thus penetrates.  
Around him ranged, now close and now remote,  
Prominent or obscure to meet the needs  
O' the mage and master, I detect each shape 875  
Subsidiary i' the scene nor loathed the less,  
All alike coloured, all descried akin  
By one and the same pitchy furnace stirred  
At the centre : see, they lick the master's hand,—  
This fox-faced horrible priest, this brother-brute 880  
The Abate,—why, mere wolfishness looks well,  
Guido stands honest in the red o' the flame,  
Beside this yellow that would pass for white,  
Twice Guido, all craft but no violence,  
This copier of the mien and gait and garb 885  
Of Peter and Paul, that he may go disguised,  
Rob halt and lame, sick folk i' the temple-porch !  
Armed with religion, fortified by law,  
A man of peace, who trims the midnight lamp  
And turns the classic page—and all for craft, 890  
All to work harm with, yet incur no scratch !  
While Guido brings the struggle to a close,  
Paul steps back the due distance, clear o' the trap

He builds and baits. Guido I catch and judge ;  
Paul is past reach in this world and my time : 895  
That is a case reserved. Pass to the next,  
The boy of the brood, the young Girolamo  
Priest, Canon, and what more ? nor wolf nor fox,  
But hybrid, neither craft nor violence  
Wholly, part violence part craft : such cross 900  
Tempts speculation—will both blend one day,  
And prove hell's better product ? Or subside  
And let the simple quality emerge,  
Go on with Satan's service the old way ?  
Meanwhile, what promise,—what performance too ! 905  
For there 's a new distinctive touch, I see,  
Lust—lacking in the two—hell's own blue tint  
That gives a character and marks the man  
More than a match for yellow and red. Once more,  
A case reserved : why should I doubt ? Then comes  
The gaunt grey nightmare in the furthest smoke, 911  
The hag that gave these three abortions birth,  
Unmotherly mother and unwomanly  
Woman, that near turns motherhood to shame,  
Womanliness to loathing : no one word, 915  
No gesture to curb cruelty a whit  
More than the she-pard thwarts her playsome whelps

Trying their milk-teeth on the soft o' the throat  
O' the first fawn, flung, with those beseeching eyes,  
Flat in the covert ! How should she but couch, 920  
Lick the dry lips, unsheathe the blunted claw,  
Catch 'twixt her placid eyewinks at what chance  
Old bloody half-forgotten dream may flit,  
Born when herself was novice to the taste,  
The while she lets youth take its pleasure. Last, 925  
These God-abandoned wretched lumps of life,  
These four companions,—country-folk this time,  
Not tainted by the unwholesome civic breath,  
Much less the curse o' the court ! Mere striplings too,  
Fit to do human nature justice still ! 930  
Surely when impudence in Guido's shape  
Shall propose crime and proffer money's-worth  
To these stout tall bright-eyed and black-haired boys,  
The blood shall bound in answer to each cheek  
Before the indignant outcry break from lip ! 935  
Are these i' the mood to murder, hardly loosed  
From healthy autumn-finish, the ploughed glebe,  
Grapes in the barrel, work at happy end,  
And winter come with rest and Christmas play ?  
How greet they Guido with his final task— 940  
(As if he but proposed " One vineyard more

“ To dig, ere frost come, then relax indeed ! ”)  
“ Anywhere, anyhow and anyway,  
“ Murder me some three people, old and young,  
“ Ye never heard the names of,—and be paid 945  
“ So much ! ” And the whole four accede at once.  
Demur ? As cattle would, bid march or halt !  
Is it some lingering habit, old fond faith  
I’ the lord o’ the land, instructs them,—birthright  
badge  
Of feudal tenure claims its slaves again ? 950  
Not so at all, thou noble human heart !  
All is done purely for the pay,—which, earned,  
And not forthcoming at the instant, makes  
Religion heresy, and the lord o’ the land  
Fit subject for a murder in his turn. 955  
The patron with cut throat and rifled purse,  
Deposited i’ the roadside-ditch, his due,  
Nought hinders each good fellow trudging home,  
The heavier by a piece or two in poke,  
And so with new zest to the common life, 960  
Mattock and spade, plough-tail and waggon-shaft,  
Till some such other piece of luck betide,  
Who knows ? Since this is a mere start in life,  
And none of them exceeds the twentieth year.

Nay, more i' the background, yet? Unnoticed forms  
Claim to be classed, subordinately vile? 966  
Complacent lookers-on that laugh,—perchance  
Shake head as their friend's horse-play grows too rough  
With the mere child he manages amiss—  
But would not interfere and make bad worse 970  
For twice the fractious tears and prayers: thou know'st  
Civility better, Marzi-Medici,  
Governor for thy kinsman the Granduke!  
Fit representative of law, man's lamp  
I' the magistrate's grasp full-flare, no rushlight-end 975  
Sputtering 'twixt thumb and finger of the priest!  
Whose answer to these Comparini's cry  
Is a threat,—whose remedy of Pompilia's wrong,  
A shrug o' the shoulder, a facetious word  
Or wink, traditional with Tuscan wits, 980  
To Guido in the doorway. Laud to law!  
The wife is pushed back to the husband, he  
Who knows how these home-squabbings persecute  
People who have the public good to mind,  
And work best with a silence in the court! 985


Ah, but I save my word at least for thee,  
Archbishop, who art under me in the Church,

---

As I am under God,—thou, chosen by both  
To do the shepherd's office, feed the sheep—  
How of this lamb that panted at thy foot 990  
While the wolf pressed on her within crook's reach?  
Wast thou the hireling that did turn and flee?  
With thee at least anon the little word!

Such denizens o' the cave now cluster round  
And heat the furnace sevenfold : time indeed 995  
A bolt from heaven should cleave roof and clear place,  
Transfix and show the world, suspiring flame,  
The main offender, scar and brand the rest  
Hurrying, each miscreant to his hole : then flood  
And purify the scene with outside day— 1000  
Which yet, in the absolute drench of dark,  
Ne'er wants a witness, some stray beauty-beam  
To the despair of hell.

First of the first,  
Such I pronounce Pompilia, then as now 1005  
Perfect in whiteness : stoop thou down, my child,  
Give one good moment to the poor old Pope  
Heart-sick at having all his world to blame—  
Let me look at thee in the flesh as erst,



Let me enjoy the old clean linen garb, 1010  
Not the new splendid vesture ! Armed and crowned,  
Would Michael, yonder, be, nor crowned nor armed,  
The less pre-eminent angel ? Everywhere  
I see in the world the intellect of man,  
That sword, the energy his subtle spear, 1015  
The knowledge which defends him like a shield—  
Everywhere ; but they make not up, I think,  
The marvel of a soul like thine, earth's flower  
She holds up to the softened gaze of God !  
It was not given Pompilia to know much, 1020  
Speak much, to write a book, to move mankind,  
Be memorized by who records my time.  
Yet if in purity and patience, if  
In faith held fast despite the plucking fiend,  
Safe like the signet stone with the new name 1025  
That saints are known by,—if in right returned  
For wrong, most pardon for worst injury,  
If there be any virtue, any praise,—  
Then will this woman-child have proved—who knows?—  
Just the one prize vouchsafed unworthy me, 1030  
Seven years a gardener of the untoward ground,  
I till,—this earth, my sweat and blood manure  
All the long day that barrenly grows dusk :

At least one blossom makes me proud at eve  
Born 'mid the briers of my enclosure ! Still 1035  
(Oh, here as elsewhere, nothingness of man !)  
Those be the plants, imbedded yonder South  
To mellow in the morning, those made fat  
By the master's eye, that yield such timid leaf,  
Uncertain bud, as product of his pains ! 1040  
While—see how this mere chance-sown, cleft-nursed seed,  
That sprang up by the wayside 'neath the foot  
Of the enemy, this breaks all into blaze,  
Spreads itself, one wide glory of desire  
To incorporate the whole great sun it loves 1045  
From the inch-height whence it looks and longs ! My  
flower,  
My rose, I gather for the breast of God,  
This I praise most in thee, where all I praise,  
That having been obedient to the end  
According to the light allotted, law 1050  
Prescribed thy life, still tried, still standing test,—  
Dutiful to the foolish parents first,  
Submissive next to the bad husband,—nay,  
Tolerant of those meaner miserable  
That did his hests, eked out the dole of pain,— 1055  
Thou, patient thus, couldst rise from law to law,



The old to the new, promoted at one cry  
O' the trump of God to the new service, not  
To longer bear, but henceforth fight, be found  
Sublime in new impatience with the foe ! 1060  
Endure man and obey God : plant firm foot  
On neck of man, tread man into the hell  
Meet for him, and obey God all the more !  
Oh child that didst despise thy life so much  
When it seemed only thine to keep or lose, 1065  
How the fine ear felt fall the first low word  
“ Value life, and preserve life for My sake ! ”  
Thou didst . . how shall I say ? . . receive so long  
The standing ordinance of God on earth,  
What wonder if the novel claim had clashed 1070  
With old requirement, seemed to supersede  
Too much the customary law ? But, brave,  
Thou at first prompting of what I call God,  
And fools call Nature, didst hear, comprehend,  
Accept the obligation laid on thee, 1075  
Mother elect, to save the unborn child,  
As brute and bird do, reptile and the fly,  
Ay and, I nothing doubt, even tree, shrub, plant  
And flower o' the field, all in a common pact  
To worthily defend the trust of trusts, 1080

Life from the Ever Living :—didst resist—  
Anticipate the office that is mine—  
And with his own sword stay the upraised arm,  
The endeavour of the wicked, and defend  
Him who,—again in my default,—was there 1085  
For visible providence : one less true than thou  
To touch, i' the past, less practised in the right,  
Approved less far in all docility  
To all instruction,—how had such an one  
Made scruple “ Is this motion a decree ? ” 1090  
It was authentic to the experienced ear  
O' the good and faithful servant. Go past me  
And get thy praise,—and be not far to seek  
Presently when I follow if I may !

And surely not so very much apart 1095  
Need I place thee, my warrior-priest,—in whom  
What if I gain the other rose, the gold,  
We grave to imitate God's miracle,  
Greet monarchs with, good rose in its degree ?  
Irregular noble scapegrace—son the same ! 1100  
Faulty—and peradventure ours the fault  
Who still misteach, mislead, throw hook and line  
Thinking to land leviathan forsooth,

Tame the scaled neck, play with him as a bird,  
And bind him for our maidens ! Better bear 1105  
The King of Pride go wantoning awhile,  
Unplagued by cord in nose and thorn in jaw,  
Through deep to deep, followed by all that shine,  
Churning the blackness hoary : He who made  
The comely terror, He shall make the sword 1110  
To match that piece of netherstone his heart,  
Ay, nor miss praise thereby ; who else shut fire  
I' the stone, to leap from mouth at sword's first stroke,  
In lamps of love and faith, the chivalry  
That dares the right and disregards alike 1115  
The yea and nay o' the world ? Self-sacrifice,—  
What if an idol took it ? Ask the Church  
Why she was wont to turn each Venus here,—  
Poor Rome perversely lingered round, despite  
Instruction, for the sake of purblind love,— 1120  
Into Madonna's shape, and waste no whit  
Of aught so rare on earth as gratitude !  
All this sweet savour was not ours but thine,  
Nard of the rock, a natural wealth we name  
Incense, and treasure up as food for saints, 1125  
When flung to us—whose function was to give  
Not find the costly perfume. Do I smile ?

Nay, Caponsacchi, much I find amiss,  
Blameworthy, punishable in this freak  
Of thine, this youth prolonged, though age was ripe,  
This masquerade in sober day, with change 1131  
Of motley too,—now hypocrite's disguise,  
Now fool's-costume : which lie was least like truth,  
Which the ungainlier, more discordant garb  
With that symmetric soul inside my son, 1135  
The churchman's or the worlding's,—let him judge,  
Our adversary who enjoys the task !  
I rather chronicle the healthy rage,—  
When the first moan broke from the martyr-maid  
At that uncaging of the beasts,—made bare 1140  
My athlete on the instant, gave such good  
Great undisguised leap over post and pale  
Right into the mid-cirque, free fighting-place.  
There may have been rash stripping—every rag  
Went to the winds,—infringement manifold 1145  
Of laws prescribed pudicity, I fear,  
In this impulsive and prompt self-display !  
Ever such tax comes of the foolish youth ;  
Men mulct the wiser manhood, and suspect  
No veritable star swims out of cloud : 1150  
Bear thou such imputation, undergo

The penalty I nowise dare relax,—  
Conventional chastisement and rebuke.  
But for the outcome, the brave starry birth  
Conciliating earth with all that cloud, 1155  
Thank heaven as I do ! Ay, such championship  
Of God at first blush, such prompt cheery thud  
Of glove on ground that answers ringingly  
The challenge of the false knight,—watch we long,  
And wait we vainly for its gallant like 1160  
From those appointed to the service, sworn  
His body-guard with pay and privilege—  
White-cinct, because in white walks sanctity,  
Red-socked, how else proclaim fine scorn of flesh,  
Unchariness of blood when blood faith begs ! 1165  
Where are the men-at-arms with cross on coat ?  
Aloof, bewraying their attire : whilst thou  
In mask and motley, pledged to dance not fight,  
Sprang'st forth the hero ! In thought, word and deed,  
How throughout all thy warfare thou wast pure, 1170  
I find it easy to believe : and if  
At any fateful moment of the strange  
Adventure, the strong passion of that strait,  
Fear and surprise, may have revealed too much,—  
As when a thundrous midnight, with black air 1175

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That burns, rain-drops that blister, breaks a spell,  
Draws out the excessive virtue of some sheathed  
Shut unsuspected flower that hoards and hides  
Immensity of sweetness,—so, perchance,  
Might the surprise and fear release too much 1180  
The perfect beauty of the body and soul  
Thou savedst in thy passion for God's sake,  
He who is Pity : was the trial sore?  
Temptation sharp? Thank God a second time!  
Why comes temptation but for man to meet 1185  
And master and make crouch beneath his foot,  
And so be pedestalled in triumph? Pray  
“Lead us into no such temptations, Lord!”  
Yea, but, O Thou whose servants are the bold,  
Lead such temptations by the head and hair, 1190  
Reluctant dragons, up to who dares fight,  
That so he may do battle and have praise!  
Do I not see the praise?—that while thy mates  
Bound to deserve i' the matter, prove at need  
Unprofitable through the very pains 1195  
We gave to train them well and start them fair,—  
Are found too stiff, with standing ranked and ranged,  
For onset in good earnest, too obtuse  
Of ear, through iteration of command,

For catching quick the sense of the real cry,— 1200  
Thou, whose sword-hand was used to strike the lute,  
Whose sentry-station graced some wanton's gate,  
Thou didst push forward and show mettle, shame  
The laggards, and retrieve the day. Well done !  
Be glad thou hast let light into the world, 1205  
Through that irregular breach o' the boundary,—see  
The same upon thy path and march assured,  
Learning anew the use of soldiership,  
Self-abnegation, freedom from all fear,  
Loyalty to the life's end ! Ruminates, 1210  
Deserve the initiatory spasm,—once more  
Work, be unhappy but bear life, my son !

And troop you, somewhere 'twixt the best and worst,  
Where crowd the indifferent product, all too poor  
Makeshift, starved samples of humanity ! 1215  
Father and mother, huddle there and hide !  
A gracious eye may find you ! Foul and fair,  
Sadly mixed natures : self-indulgent,—yet  
Self-sacrificing too : how the love soars,  
How the craft, avarice, vanity and spite 1220  
Sink again ! So they keep the middle course,  
Slide into silly crime at unaware,

Slip back upon the stupid virtue, stay  
Nowhere enough for being classed, I hope  
And fear. Accept the swift and rueful death, 1225  
Taught, somewhat sternlier than is wont, what waits  
The ambiguous creature,—how the one black tuft  
Steadies the aim of the arrow just as well  
As the wide faultless white on the bird's breast !  
Nay, you were punished in the very part 1230  
That looked most pure of speck,—'t was honest love  
Betrayed you,—did love seem most worthy pains,  
Challenge such purging, since ordained survive  
When all the rest of you was done with ? Go !  
Never again elude the choice of tints ! 1235  
White shall not neutralize the black, nor good  
Compensate bad in man, absolve him so :  
Life's business being just the terrible choice.

So do I see, pronounce on all and some  
Grouped for my judgment now,—profess no doubt 1240  
While I pronounce : dark, difficult enough  
The human sphere, yet eyes grow sharp by use,  
I find the truth, dispart the shine from shade,  
As a mere man may, with no special touch  
O' the lynx-gift in each ordinary orb : 1245





Nay, if the popular notion class me right,  
One of well nigh decayed intelligence,—  
What of that? Through hard labour and good will,  
And habitude that gives a blind man sight  
At the practised finger-ends of him, I do 1250  
Discern, and dare decree in consequence,  
Whatever prove the peril of mistake.

Whence, then, this quite new quick cold thrill,—cloud-  
like,

This keen dread creeping from a quarter scarce  
Suspected in the skies I nightly scan? 1255

What slacks the tense nerve, saps the wound-up spring  
Of the act that should and shall be, sends the mount  
And mass o' the whole man's-strength,—conglobed so  
late—

Shudderingly into dust, a moment's work? . .  
While I stand firm, go fearless, in this world, 1260

For this life recognise and arbitrate,  
Touch and let stay, or else remove a thing,  
Judge "This is right, this object out of place,"  
Candle in hand that helps me and to spare,—  
What if a voice deride me, "Perk and pry! 1265

"Brighten each nook with thine intelligence!  
"Play the good householder, ply man and maid

“ With tasks prolonged into the midnight, test  
“ Their work and nowise stint of the due wage  
“ Each worthy worker : but with gyves and whip 1270  
“ Pay thou misprision of a single point  
“ Plain to thy happy self who lift'st the light,  
“ Lament'st the darkling,—bold to all beneath !  
“ What if thyself adventure, now the place  
“ Is purged so well? Leave pavement and mount roof,  
“ Look round thee for the light of the upper sky, 1276  
“ The fire which lit thy fire which finds default  
“ In Guido Franceschini to his cost !  
“ What if, above in the domain of light,  
“ Thou miss the accustomed signs, remark eclipse? 1280  
“ Shalt thou still gaze on ground nor lift a lid,—  
“ Steady in thy superb prerogative,  
“ Thy inch of inkling,—nor once face the doubt  
“ I' the sphere above thee, darkness to be felt ? ”

Yet my poor spark had for its source, the sun ; 1285  
Thither I sent the great looks which compel  
Light from its fount : all that I do and am  
Comes from the truth, or seen or else surmised,  
Remembered or divined, as mere man may :  
I know just so, nor otherwise. As I know, 1290

I speak,—what should I know, then, and how speak  
Were there a wild mistake of eye or brain  
As to recorded governance above?  
If my own breath, only, blew coal alight .  
I styled celestial and the morning-star? 1295  
I, who in this world act resolvedly,  
Dispose of men, their bodies and their souls,  
As they acknowledge or gainsay the light  
I show them,—shall I too lack courage?—leave  
I, too, the post of me, like those I blame? 1300  
Refuse, with kindred inconsistency,  
To grapple danger whereby souls grow strong?  
I am near the end ; but still not at the end ;  
All to the very end is trial in life :  
At this stage is the trial of my soul 1305  
Danger to face, or danger to refuse?  
Shall I dare try the doubt now, or not dare?

O Thou,—as represented here to me  
In such conception as my soul allows,—  
Under Thy measureless, my atom width!— 1310  
Man's mind, what is it but a convex glass  
Wherein are gathered all the scattered points  
Picked out of the immensity of sky,

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To re-unite there, be our heaven for earth,  
Our known unknown, our God revealed to man? 1315  
Existent somewhere, somehow, as a whole ;  
Here, as a whole proportioned to our sense,—  
There, (which is nowhere, speech must babble thus !)  
In the absolute immensity, the whole  
Appreciable solely by Thyself,— 1320  
Here, by the little mind of man, reduced  
To littleness that suits his faculty,  
In the degree appreciable too ;  
Between Thee and ourselves—nay even, again,  
Below us, to the extreme of the minute, 1325  
Appreciable by how many and what diverse  
Modes of the life Thou madest be ! (why live  
Except for love,—how love unless they know ?)  
Each of them, only filling to the edge,  
Insect or angel, his just length and breadth, 1330  
Due facet of reflection,—full, no less,  
Angel or insect, as Thou framedst things.  
I it is who have been appointed here  
To represent Thee, in my turn, on earth,  
Just as, if new philosophy know aught, 1335  
This one earth, out of all the multitude  
Of peopled worlds, as stars are now supposed,—

Was chosen, and no sun-star of the swarm,  
For stage and scene of Thy transcendent act  
Beside which even the creation fades 1340  
Into a puny exercise of power.  
Choice of the world, choice of the thing I am,  
Both emanate alike from Thy dread play  
Of operation outside this our sphere  
Where things are classed and counted small or great,—  
Incomprehensibly the choice is Thine ! 1346  
I therefore bow my head and take Thy place.  
There is, beside the works, a tale of Thee  
In the world's mouth, which I find credible :  
I love it with my heart : unsatisfied, 1350  
I try it with my reason, nor disceit  
From any point I probe and pronounce sound.  
Mind is not matter nor from matter, but  
Above,—leave matter then, proceed with mind !  
Man's be the mind recognized at the height,— 1355  
Leave the inferior minds and look at man !  
Is he the strong, intelligent and good  
Up to his own conceivable height ? Nowise.  
Enough o' the low,—soar the conceivable height,  
Find cause to match the effect in evidence, 1360  
The work i' the world, not man's but God's ; leave man !

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Conjecture of the worker by the work :

Is there strength there ?—enough : intelligence ?

Ample : but goodness in a like degree ?

Not to the human eye in the present state, 1365

An isoscele deficient in the base.

What lacks, then, of perfection fit for God

But just the instance which this tale supplies

Of love without a limit ? So is strength,

So is intelligence ; let love be so, 1370

Unlimited in its self-sacrifice,

Then is the tale true and God shows complete.

Beyond the tale, I reach into the dark,

Feel what I cannot see, and still faith stands :

I can believe this dread machinery 1375

Of sin and sorrow, would confound me else,

Devised,—all pain, at most expenditure

Of pain by Who devised pain,—to evolve,

By new machinery in counterpart,

The moral qualities of man—how else ?— 1380

To make him love in turn and be beloved,

Creative and self-sacrificing too,

And thus eventually God-like, (ay,

“ I have said ye are Gods,”—shall it be said for nought ?)

Enable man to wring, from out all pain, 1385

All pleasure for a common heritage  
To all eternity : this may be surmised,  
The other is revealed,—whether a fact,  
Absolute, abstract, independent truth,  
Historic, not reduced to suit man's mind,— 1390  
Or only truth reverberate, changed, made pass  
A spectrum into mind, the narrow eye,—  
The same and not the same, else unconceived—  
Though quite conceivable to the next grade  
Above it in intelligence,—as truth 1395  
Easy to man were blindness to the beast  
By parity of procedure,—the same truth  
In a new form, but changed in either case :  
What matter so intelligence be filled ?  
To a child, the sea is angry, for it roars : 1400  
Frost bites, else why the tooth-like fret on face ?  
Man makes acoustics deal with the sea's wrath,  
Explains the choppy cheek by chymic law,—  
To man and child remains the same effect  
On drum of ear and root of nose, change cause 1405  
Never so thoroughly : so my heart be struck,  
What care I,—by God's gloved hand or the bare ?  
Nor do I much perplex me with aught hard,  
Dubious in the transmitting of the tale,—

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No, nor with certain riddles set to solve. 1410

This life is training and a passage ; pass,—

Still, we march over some flat obstacle

We made give way before us ; solid truth

In front of it, what motion for the world ?

The moral sense grows but by exercise. 1415

'T is even as man grew probatively

Initiated in Godship, set to make

A fairer moral world than this he finds,

Guess now what shall be known hereafter. Deal

Thus with the present problem : as we see, 1420

A faultless creature is destroyed, and sin

Has had its way i' the world where God should rule.

Ay, but for this irrelevant circumstance

Of inquisition after blood, we see

Pompilia lost and Guido saved : how long ? 1425

For his whole life : how much is that whole life ?

We are not babes, but know the minute's worth,

And feel that life is large and the world small,

So, wait till life have passed from out the world.

Neither does this astonish at the end, 1430

That whereas I can so receive and trust,

Other men, made with hearts and souls the same,



Reject and disbelieve,—subordinate  
The future to the present,—sin, nor fear.  
This I refer still to the foremost fact, 1435  
Life is probation and the earth no goal  
But starting-point of man : compel him strive,  
Which means, in man, as good as reach the goal,—  
Why institute that race, his life, at all ?  
But this does overwhelm me with surprise, 1440  
Touch me to terror,—not that faith, the pearl,  
Should be let lie by fishers wanting food,—  
Nor, seen and handled by a certain few  
Critical and contemptuous, straight consigned  
To shore and shingle for the pebble it proves,— 1445  
But that, when haply found and known and named  
By the residue made rich for evermore,  
These,—that these favoured ones, should in a trice  
Turn, and with double zest go dredge for whelks,  
Mud-worms that make the savoury soup ! Enough 1450  
O' the disbelievers, see the faithful few !  
How do the Christians here deport them, keep  
Their robes of white unspotted by the world ?  
What is this Aretine Archbishop, this  
Man under me as I am under God, 1455  
This champion of the faith, I armed and decked,

Pushed forward, put upon a pinnacle,  
To show the enemy his victor,—see !  
What 's the best fighting when the couple close ?  
Pompilia cries, " Protect me from the wolf ! " 1460  
He—" No, thy Guido is rough, heady, strong,  
" Dangerous to disquiet : let him bide !  
" He needs some bone to mumble, help amuse  
" The darkness of his den with : so, the fawn  
" Which limps up bleeding to my foot and lies, 1465  
" —Come to me, daughter !—thus I throw him back !"  
Have we misjudged here, over-armed our knight,  
Given gold and silk where plain hard steel serves best,  
Enfeebled whom we sought to fortify,  
Made an archbishop and undone a saint ? 1470  
Well, then, descend these heights, this pride of life,  
Sit in the ashes with a barefoot monk  
Who long ago stamped out the worldly sparks,  
By fasting, watching, stone cell and wire scourge,  
—No such indulgence as unknits the strength— 1475  
These breed the tight nerve and tough cuticle,  
And the world's praise or blame runs rillet-wise  
Off the broad back and brawny breast, we know !  
He meets the first cold sprinkle of the world,  
And shudders to the marrow. " Save this child ? 1480

“ Oh, my superiors, oh, the Archbishop’s self !  
“ Who was it dared lay hand upon the ark  
“ His betters saw fall nor put finger forth ?  
“ Great ones could help yet help not : why should small ?  
“ I break my promise : let her break her heart ! ” 1485  
These are the Christians not the worldlings, not  
The sceptics, who thus battle for the faith !  
If foolish virgins disobey and sleep,  
What wonder ? But, this time, the wise that watch,  
Sell lamps and buy lutes, exchange oil for wine, 1490  
The mystic Spouse betrays the Bridegroom here.  
To our last resource, then ! Since all flesh is weak,  
Bind weaknesses together, we get strength :  
The individual weighed, found wanting, try  
Some institution, honest artifice 1495  
Whereby the units grow compact and firm !  
Each props the other, and so stand is made  
By our embodied cowards that grow brave.  
The Monastery called of Convertites,  
Meant to help women because these helped Christ,—  
A thing existent only while it acts, 1501  
Does as designed, else a nonentity,—  
For what is an idea unrealized ?—  
Pompilia is consigned to these for help.

They do help : they are prompt to testify 1505  
To her pure life and saintly dying days.  
She dies, and lo, who seemed so poor, proves rich !  
What does the body that lives through helpfulness  
To women for Christ's sake ? The kiss turns bite,  
The dove's note changes to the crow's cry : judge ! 1510  
“ Seeing that this our Convent claims of right  
“ What goods belong to those we succour, be  
“ The same proved women of dishonest life,—  
“ And seeing that this Trial made appear  
“ Pompilia was in such predicament,— 1515  
“ The Convent hereupon pretends to said  
“ Succession of Pompilia, issues writ,  
“ And takes possession by the Fisc's advice.”  
Such is their attestation to the cause  
Of Christ, who had one saint at least, they hoped : 1520  
But, is a title-deed to filch, a corpse  
To slander, and an infant-heir to cheat ?  
Christ must give up his gains then ! They unsay  
All the fine speeches,—who was saint is whore.  
Why, scripture yields no parallel for this ! 1525  
The soldiers only threw dice for Christ's coat ;  
We want another legend of the Twelve  
Disputing if it was Christ's coat at all,

Claiming as prize the woof of price—for why?  
The Master was a thief, purloined the same, 1530  
Or paid for it out of the common bag!  
Can it be this is end and outcome, all  
I take with me to show as stewardship's fruit,  
The best yield of the latest time, this year  
The seventeen-hundredth since God died for man? 1535  
Is such effect proportionate to cause?  
And still the terror keeps on the increase  
When I perceive . . . how can I blink the fact?  
That the fault, the obduracy to good,  
Lies not with the impracticable stuff 1540  
Whence man is made, his very nature's fault,  
As if it were of ice, the moon may gild  
Not melt, or stone, 't was meant the sun should warm  
Not make bear flowers,—nor ice nor stone to blame:  
But it can melt, that ice, can bloom, that stone, 1545  
Impassible to rule of day and night!  
This terrifies me, thus compelled perceive,  
Whatever love and faith we looked should spring  
At advent of the authoritative star,  
Which yet lie sluggish, curdled at the source,— 1550  
These have leapt forth profusely in old time,  
These still respond with promptitude to-day,

At challenge of—what unacknowledged powers  
O' the air, what uncommissioned meteors, warmth  
By law, and light by rule should supersede? 1555  
For see this priest, this Caponsacchi, stung  
At the first summons,—“ Help for honour's sake,  
“ Play the man, pity the oppressed !”—no pause,  
How does he lay about him in the midst,  
Strike any foe, right wrong at any risk, 1560  
All blindness, bravery and obedience !—blind ?  
Ay, as a man would be inside the sun,  
Delirious with the plentitude of light  
Should interfuse him to the finger-ends—  
Let him rush straight, and how shall he go wrong ? 1565  
Where are the Christians in their panoply ?  
The loins we girt about with truth, the breasts  
Righteousness plated round, the shield of faith,  
The helmet of salvation, and that sword  
O' the Spirit, even the word of God,—where these ? 1570  
Slunk into corners ! Oh, I hear at once  
Hubbub of protestation ! “ What, we monks  
“ We friars, of such an order, such a rule,  
“ Have not we fought, bled, left our martyr-mark  
“ At every point along the boundary-line 1575  
“ 'Twixt true and false, religion and the world,

“ Where this or the other dogma of our Church  
“ Called for defence ? ” And I, despite myself,  
How can I but speak loud what truth speaks low,  
“ Or better than the best, or nothing serves ! ” 1580  
“ What boots deed, I can cap and cover straight  
“ With such another doughtiness to match,  
“ Done at an instinct of the natural man ? ”  
Immolate body, sacrifice soul too,—  
Do not these publicans the same ? Outstrip ! 1585  
Or else stop race, you boast runs neck and neck,  
You with the wings, they with the feet,—for shame !  
Oh, I remark your diligence and zeal !  
Five years long, now, rounds faith into my ears,  
“ Help thou, or Christendom is done to death ! ” 1590  
Five years since, in the Province of To-kien,  
Which is in China as some people know,  
Maigrot, my Vicar Apostolic there,  
Having a great qualm, issues a decree.  
Alack, the converts use as God’s name, not 1595  
*Tien-chu* but plain *Tien* or else mere *Shang-ti*,  
As Jesuits please to fancy politic,  
While, say Dominicans, it calls down fire,—  
For *Tien* means heaven, and *Shang-ti*, supreme prince,  
While *Tien-chu* means the lord of heaven : all cry, 1600

“ There is no business urgent for despatch  
“ As that thou send a legate, specially  
“ Cardinal Tournon, straight to Peking, there  
“ To settle and compose the difference !”

So have I seen a potentate all fume 1605  
For some infringement of his realm's just right,  
Some menace to a mud-built straw-thatched farm  
O' the frontier ; while inside the mainland lie,  
Quite undisputed-for in solitude,  
Whole cities plague may waste or famine sap : 1610  
What if the sun crumble, the sands encroach,  
While he looks on sublimely at his ease ?  
How does their ruin touch the empire's bound ?

And is this little all that was to be ?  
Where is the gloriously-decisive change, 1615  
Metamorphosis the immeasurable  
Of human clay to divine gold, we looked  
Should, in some poor sort, justify its price ?  
Had an adept of the mere Rosy Cross  
Spent his life to consummate the Great Work, 1620  
Would not we start to see the stuff it touched  
Yield not a grain more than the vulgar got  
By the old smelting-process years ago ?



If this were sad to see in just the sage  
Who should profess so much, perform no more, 1625  
What is it when suspected in that Power  
Who undertook to make and made the world,  
Devised and did effect man, body and soul,  
Ordained salvation for them both, and yet . .  
Well, is the thing we see, salvation? 1630

## I

Put no such dreadful question to myself,  
Within whose circle of experience burns  
The central truth, Power, Wisdom, Goodness,—God :  
I must outlive a thing ere know it dead : 1635  
When I outlive the faith there is a sun,  
When I lie, ashes to the very soul,—  
Someone, not I, must wail above the heap,  
“ He died in dark whence never morn arose.”  
While I see day succeed the deepest night— 1640  
How can I speak but as I know?—my speech  
Must be, throughout the darkness, “ It will end : ”  
“ The light that did burn, will burn ! ” Clouds obscure—  
But for which obscuration all were bright ?  
Too hastily concluded ! Sun-suffused, 1645  
A cloud may soothe the eye made blind by blaze,—  
Better the very clarity of heaven :

The soft streaks are the beautiful and dear.  
What but the weakness in a faith supplies  
The incentive to humanity, no strength 1650  
Absolute, irresistible, comports?  
How can man love but what he yearns to help?  
And that which men think weakness within strength,  
But angels know for strength and stronger yet—  
What were it else but the first things made new, 1655  
But repetition of the miracle,  
The divine instance of self-sacrifice  
That never ends and aye begins for man?  
So, never I miss footing in the maze,  
No,—I have light nor fear the dark at all. 1660

But are mankind not real, who pace outside  
My petty circle, the world measured me?  
And when they stumble even as I stand,  
Have I a right to stop ear when they cry,  
As they were phantoms, took the clouds for crags, 1665  
Tripped and fell, where the march of men might move?  
Beside, the cry is other than a ghost's,  
When out of the old time there pleads some bard,  
Philosopher, or both, and—whispers not,  
But words it boldly. "The inward work and worth 1670

- “ Of any mind, what other mind may judge  
“ Save God who only knows the thing He made,  
“ The veritable service He exacts?  
“ It is the outward product men appraise.  
“ Behold, an engine hoists a tower aloft : 1675  
“ ‘ I looked that it should move the mountain too !’  
“ Or else ‘ Had just a turret toppled down,  
“ ‘ Success enough !’—may say the Machinist  
“ Who knows what less or more result might be :  
“ But we, who see that done we cannot do, 1680  
“ ‘ A feat beyond man’s force,’ we men must say.  
“ Regard me and that shake I gave the world !  
“ I was born, not so long before Christ’s birth,  
“ As Christ’s birth haply did precede thy day,—  
“ But many a watch, before the star of dawn : 1685  
“ Therefore I lived,—it is thy creed affirms,  
“ Pope Innocent, who art to answer me !—  
“ Under conditions, nowise to escape,  
“ Whereby salvation was impossible.  
“ Each impulse to achieve the good and fair, 1690  
“ Each aspiration to the pure and true,  
“ Being without a warrant or an aim,  
“ Was just as sterile a felicity  
“ As if the insect, born to spend his life

- “ Soaring his circles, stopped them to describe 1695  
“ (Painfully motionless in the mid-air)  
“ Some word of weighty counsel for man’s sake,  
“ Some ‘ Know thyself ’ or ‘ Take the golden mean ! ’  
“ —Forewent his happy dance and the glad ray,  
“ Died half an hour the sooner and was dust. 1700  
“ I, born to perish like the brutes, or worse,  
“ Why not live brutishly, obey my law?  
“ But I, of body as of soul complete,  
“ A gymnast at the games, philosopher  
“ I’ the schools, who painted, and made music,—all 1705  
“ Glories that met upon the tragic stage  
“ When the Third Poet’s tread surprised the Two,—  
“ Whose lot fell in a land where life was great  
“ And sense went free and beauty lay profuse,  
“ I, untouched by one adverse circumstance, 1710  
“ Adopted virtue as my rule of life,  
“ Waived all reward, and loved for loving’s sake,  
“ And, what my heart taught me, I taught the world,  
“ And have been teaching now two thousand years. 1714  
“ Witness my work,—plays that should please, forsooth !  
“ ‘ They might please, they may displease, they shall  
teach,  
“ ‘ For truth’s sake,’ so I said, and did, and do.

- “ Five hundred years ere Paul spoke, Felix heard,—  
“ How much of temperance and righteousness,  
“ Judgment to come, did I find reason for, 1720  
“ Corroborate with my strong style that spared  
“ No sin, nor swerved the more from branding brow  
“ Because the sinner was called Zeus and God?  
“ How nearly did I guess at that Paul knew?  
“ How closely come, in what I represent 1725  
“ As duty, to his doctrine yet a blank?  
“ And as that limner not untruly limns  
“ Who draws an object round or square, which square  
“ Or round seems to the unassisted eye,  
“ Though Galileo’s tube display the same 1730  
“ Oval or oblong,—so, who controverts  
“ I rendered rightly what proves wrongly wrought  
“ Beside Paul’s picture? Mine was true for me.  
“ I saw that there are, first and above all,  
“ The hidden forces, blind necessities, 1735  
“ Named Nature, but the thing’s self unconceived:  
“ Then follow,—how dependent upon these,  
“ We know not, how imposed above ourselves,  
“ We well know,—what I name the gods, a power  
“ Various or one: for great and strong and good 1740  
“ Is there, and little, weak and bad there too,

- “ Wisdom and folly : say, these make no God,—  
“ What is it else that rules outside man’s self?  
“ A fact then,—always, to the naked eye,—  
“ And so, the one revealment possible 1745  
“ Of what were unimagined else by man.  
“ Therefore, what gods do, man may criticise,  
“ Applaud, condemn,—how should he fear the truth?  
“ But likewise have in awe because of power,  
“ Venerate for the main munificence, 1750  
“ And give the doubtful deed its due excuse  
“ From the acknowledged creature of a day  
“ To the Eternal and Divine. Thus, bold  
“ Yet self-mistrusting, should man bear himself,  
“ Most assured on what now concerns him most— 1755  
“ The law of his own life, the path he prints,—  
“ Which law is virtue and not vice, I say,—  
“ And least inquisitive where least search skills,  
“ I’ the nature we best give the clouds to keep.  
“ What could I paint beyond a schene like this 1760  
“ Out of the fragmentary truths where light  
“ Lay fitful in a tenebrific time?  
“ You have the sunrise now, joins truth to truth,  
“ Shoots life and substance into death and void ;  
“ Themselves compose the whole we made before : 1765

- “ The forces and necessity grow God,—  
“ The beings so contrarious that seemed gods,  
“ Prove just His operation manifold  
“ And multiform, translated, as must be,  
“ Into intelligible shape so far 1770  
“ As suits our sense and sets us free to feel :  
“ What if I let a child think, childhood-long,  
“ That lightning, I would have him spare his eye,  
“ Is a real arrow shot at naked orb ? 1774  
“ The man knows more, but shuts his lids the same :  
“ Lightning’s cause comprehends nor man nor child.  
“ Why then, my scheme, your better knowledge broke,  
“ Presently re-adjusts itself, the small  
“ Proportioned largelier, parts and whole named new :  
“ So much, no more two thousand years have done !  
“ Pope, dost thou dare pretend to punish me, 1781  
“ For not descrying sunshine at midnight,  
“ Me who crept all-fours, found my way so far—  
“ While thou rewardest teachers of the truth,  
“ Who miss the plain way in the blaze of noon,— 1785  
“ Though just a word from that strong style of mine,  
“ Grasped honestly in hand as guiding-staff,  
“ Had pricked them a sure path across the bog,  
“ That mire of cowardice and slush of lies

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“Wherein I find them wallow in wide day?” 1790

How should I answer this Euripides?

Paul,—’t is a legend,—answered Seneca,

But that was in the day-spring ; noon is now

We have got too familiar with the light.

Shall I wish back once more that thrill of dawn? 1795

When the whole truth-touched man burned up, one fire?

—Assured the trial, fiery, fierce, but fleet,

Would, from his little heap of ashes, lend

Wings to that conflagration of the world

Which Christ awaits ere He makes all things new—

So should the frail become the perfect, rapt 1801

From glory of pain to glory of joy ; and so,

Even in the end,—the act renouncing earth,

Lands, houses, husbands, wives and children here,—

Begin that other act which finds all, lost, 1805

Regained, in this time even, a hundredfold,

And, in the next time, feels the finite love

Blent and embalmed with its eternal life.

So does the sun ghastlily seem to sink

In those north parts, lean all but out of life, 1810

Desist a dread mere breathing-stop, then slow

Re-assert day, begin the endless rise.



Was this too easy for our after-stage ?  
Was such a lighting-up of faith, in life,  
Only allowed initiate, set man's step 1815  
In the true way by help of the great glow ?  
A way wherein it is ordained he walk,  
Bearing to see the light from heaven still more  
And more encroached on by the light of earth,  
Tentatives earth puts forth to rival heaven, 1820  
Earthly incitements that mankind serve God  
For man's sole sake, not God's and therefore man's.  
Till at last, who distinguishes the sun  
From a mere Druid fire on a far mount ?  
More praise to him who with his subtle prism 1825  
Shall decompose both beams and name the true.  
In such sense, who is last proves first indeed ;  
For how could saints and martyrs fail see truth  
Streak the night's blackness ? Who is faithful now,  
Untwists heaven's pure white from the yellow flare 1830  
O' the world's gross torch, without a foil to help  
Produce the Christian act, so possible  
When in the way stood Nero's cross and stake,—  
So hard now that the world smiles " Rightly done !  
" It is the politic, the thrifty way, 1835  
" Will clearly make you in the end returns

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“ Beyond our fool’s-sport and improvidence :  
“ We fools go thro’ the cornfield of this life,  
“ Pluck ears to left and right and swallow raw,  
“ —Nay, tread, at pleasure, a sheaf underfoot, 1840  
“ To get the better at some poppy-flower,—  
“ Well aware we shall have so much wheat less  
“ In the eventual harvest : you meantime  
“ Waste not a spike,—the richlier will you reap !  
“ What then ? There will be always garnered meal  
“ Sufficient for our comfortable loaf, 1846  
“ While you enjoy the undiminished prize ! ”  
Is it not this ignoble confidence,  
Cowardly hardihood, that dulls and damps,  
Makes the old heroism impossible ? 1850

Unless . . what whispers me of times to come ?  
What if it be the mission of that age,  
My death will usher into life, to shake  
This torpor of assurance from our creed,  
Re-introduce the doubt discarded, bring 1855  
That formidable danger back, we drove  
Long ago to the distance and the dark ?  
No wild beast now prowls round the infant camp :  
We have built wall and sleep in city safe :

But if some earthquake try the towers, that laugh 1860  
 To think they once saw lions rule outside,  
 And man stand out again, pale, resolute,  
 Prepared to die,—that is, alive at last?  
 As we broke up that old faith of the world,  
 Have we, next age, to break up this the new— 1865  
 Faith, in the thing, grown faith in the report—  
 Whence need to bravely disbelieve report  
 Through increased faith i' the thing reports belie?  
 Must we deny,—do they, these Molinists,  
 At peril of their body and their soul,— 1870  
 Recognized truths, obedient to some truth  
 Unrecognized yet, but perceptible?—  
 Correct the portrait by the living face,  
 Man's God, by God's God in the mind of man?  
 Then, for the few that rise to the new height, 1875  
 The many that must sink to the old depth,  
 The multitude found fall away! A few,  
 E'en ere new law speak clear, may keep the old,  
 Preserve the Christian level, call good good  
 And evil evil, (even though razed and blank 1880  
 The old titles,) helped by custom, habitude,  
 And all else they mistake for finer sense  
 O' the fact than reason warrants,—as before,

They hope perhaps, fear not impossibly.  
At least some one Pompilia left the world 1885  
Will say "I know the right place by foot's feel,  
"I took it and tread firm there; wherefore change?"  
But what a multitude will surely fall  
Quite through the crumbling truth, late subjacent,  
Sink to the next discoverable base, 1890  
Rest upon human nature, settle there  
On what is firm, the lust and pride of life!  
A mass of men, whose very souls even now  
Seem to need re-creating,—so they slink  
Worm-like into the mud, light now lays bare,— 1895  
Whose future we dispose of with shut eyes  
And whisper—"They are grafted, barren twigs,  
"Into the living stock of Christ: may bear  
"One day, till when they lie death-like, not dead,"—  
Those who with all the aid of Christ succumb, 1900  
How, without Christ, shall they, unaided, sink?  
Whither but to this gulf before my eyes?  
Do not we end, the century and I?  
The impatient antimasque treads close on kibe  
O' the very masque's self it will mock,—on me, 1905  
Last lingering personage, the impatient mime  
Pushes already,—will I block the way?

Will my slow trail of garments ne'er leave space  
For pantaloon, sock, plume and castanet ?  
Here comes the first experimentalist 1910  
In the new order of things,—he plays a priest ;  
Does he take inspiration from the Church,  
Directly make her rule his law of life ?  
Not he : his own mere impulse guides the man—  
Happily sometimes, since ourselves allow 1915  
He has danced, in gaiety of heart, i' the main  
The right step through the maze we bade him foot.  
But if his heart had prompted to break loose  
And mar the measure ? Why, we must submit,  
And thank the chance that brought him safe so far.  
Will he repeat the prodigy ? Perhaps. 1921  
Can he teach others how to quit themselves,  
Show why this step was right while that were wrong ?  
How should he ? " Ask your hearts as I asked mine,  
" And get discreetly through the morrice too ; 1925  
" If your hearts misdirect you,—quit the stage,  
" And make amends,—be there amends to make !"  
Such is, for the Augustin that was once,  
This Canon Caponsacchi we see now.  
" But my heart answers to another tune," 1930  
Puts in the Abate, second in the suite,

“ I have my taste too, and tread no such step !  
“ You choose the glorious life, and may, for me !  
“ I like the lowest of life’s appetites,—  
“ So you judge,—but the very truth of joy 1935  
“ To my own apprehension which decides.  
“ Call me knave and you get yourself called fool !  
“ I live for greed, ambition, lust, revenge ;  
“ Attain these ends by force, guile : hypocrite,  
“ To-day, perchance to-morrow recognized 1940  
“ The rational man, the type of common sense.”  
There ’s Loyola adapted to our time !  
Under such guidance Guido plays his part,  
He also influencing in the due turn  
These last clods where I track intelligence 1945  
By any glimmer, these four at his beck  
Ready to murder any, and, at their own,  
As ready to murder him,—such make the world !  
And, first effect of the new cause of things,  
There they lie also duly,—the old pair 1950  
Of the weak head and not so wicked heart,  
With the one Christian mother, wife and girl,  
—Which three gifts seem to make an angel up,—  
The world’s first foot o’ the dance is on their  
heads !

Still, I stand here, not off the stage though close 1955  
On the exit : and my last act, as my first,  
I owe the scene, and Him who armed me thus  
With Paul's sword as with Peter's key. I smite  
With my whole strength once more, ere end my part,  
Ending, so far as man may, this offence. 1960  
And when I raise my arm, who plucks my sleeve ?  
Who stops me in the righteous function,—foe  
Or friend ? O, still as ever, friends are they  
Who, in the interest of outraged truth  
Deprecate such rough handling of a lie ! 1965  
The facts being proved and incontestable,  
What is the last word I must listen to ?  
Perchance—"Spare yet a term this barren stock,  
" We pray thee dig about and dung and dress  
" Till he repent and bring forth fruit even yet !" 1970  
Perchance—"So poor and swift a punishment  
" Shall throw him out of life with all that sin :  
" Let mercy rather pile up pain on pain  
" Till the flesh expiate what the soul pays else !"  
Nowise ! Remonstrants on each side commence 1975  
Instructing, there 's a new tribunal now  
Higher than God's—the educated man's !  
Nice sense of honour in the human breast

Supersedes here the old coarse oracle—  
Confirming none the less a point or so 1980  
Wherein blind predecessors worked aright  
By rule of thumb : as when Christ said,—when, where ?  
Enough, I find it pleaded in a place,—  
“ All other wrongs done, patiently I take :  
“ But touch my honour and the case is changed ! 1985  
“ I feel the due resentment,—*nemini*  
“ *Honorem trado*, is my quick retort.”  
Right of Him, just as if pronounced to-day !  
Still, should the old authority be mute,  
Or doubtful, or in speaking clash with new, 1990  
The younger takes permission to decide.  
At last we have the instinct of the world  
Ruling its household without tutelage :  
And while the two laws, human and divine,  
Have busied finger with this tangled case, 1995  
In pushes the brisk junior, cuts the knot,  
Pronounces for acquittal. How it trips  
Silverly o’er the tongue ! “ Remit the death !  
“ Forgive, . . well, in the old way, if thou please,  
“ Decency and the relics of routine 2000  
“ Respected,—let the Count go free as air !  
“ Since he may plead a priest’s immunity,—



- “ The minor orders help enough for that,  
“ With Farinacci’s licence,—who decides  
“ That the mere implication of such man, 2005  
“ So privileged, in any cause, before  
“ Whatever court except the Spiritual,  
“ Straight quashes law-procedure,—quash it, then !  
“ Remains a pretty loophole of escape  
“ Moreover, that, beside the patent fact 2010  
“ O’ the law’s allowance, there ’s involved the weal  
“ O’ the Popedom : a son’s privilege at stake,  
“ Thou wilt pretend the Church’s interest,  
“ Ignore all finer reasons to forgive !  
“ But herein lies the crowning cogency— 2015  
“ (Let thy friends teach thee while thou tellest beads)  
“ That in this case the spirit of culture speaks,  
“ Civilization is imperative.  
“ To her shall we remand all delicate points  
“ Henceforth, nor take irregular advice 2020  
“ O’ the sly, as heretofore : she used to hint  
“ Remonstrances, when law was out of sorts  
“ Because a saucy tongue was put to rest,  
“ An eye that roved was cured of arrogance :  
“ But why be forced to mumble under breath 2025  
“ What soon shall be acknowledged the plain fact,

- “ Outspoken, say, in thy successor’s time ?  
“ Methinks we see the golden age return !  
“ Civilization and the Emperor  
“ Succeed to Christianity and Pope. 2030  
“ One Emperor then, as one Pope now : meanwhile,  
“ Anticipate a little ! We tell thee ‘ Take  
“ ‘ Guido’s life, sapped society shall crash,  
“ ‘ Whereof the main prop was, is, and shall be  
“ ‘ —Supremacy of husband over wife !’ 2035  
“ Does the man rule i’ the house, and may his mate  
“ Because of any plea dispute the same ?  
“ Oh, pleas of all sorts shall abound, be sure,  
“ One but allowed validity,—for, harsh  
“ And savage, for, inept and silly-sooth, 2040  
“ For, this and that, will the ingenious sex  
“ Demonstrate the best master e’er graced slave :  
“ And there ’s but one short way to end the coil,—  
“ Acknowledge right and reason steadily  
“ I’ the man and master : then the wife submits 2045  
“ To plain truth broadly stated. Does the time  
“ Advise we shift—a pillar ? nay, a stake  
“ Out of its place i’ the social tenement ?  
“ One touch may send a shudder through the heap  
“ And bring it toppling on our children’s heads ! 2050

- “ Moreover, if ours breed a qualm in thee,  
“ Give thine own better feeling play for once !  
“ Thou, whose own life winks o’er the socket-edge,  
“ Would’st thou it went out in such ugly snuff  
“ As dooming sons dead, e’en though justice prompt ?  
“ Why, on a certain feast, Barabbas’ self 2056  
“ Was set free, not to cloud the general cheer :  
“ Neither shalt thou pollute thy Sabbath close !  
“ Mercy is safe and graceful. How one hears  
“ The howl begin, scarce the three little taps 2060  
“ O’ the silver mallet silent on thy brow,—  
“ ‘ His last act was to sacrifice a Count  
“ ‘ And thereby screen a scandal of the Church !  
“ ‘ Guido condemned, the Canon justified  
“ ‘ Of course,—delinquents of his cloth go free !’ 2065  
“ And so the Luthers chuckle, Calvins scowl,  
“ So thy hand helps Molinos to the chair  
“ Whence he may hold forth till doom’s day on just  
“ These *petit-mâitre* priestlings,—in the choir,  
“ *Sanctus et Benedictus*, with a brush 2070  
“ Of soft guitar-strings that obey the thumb,  
“ Touched by the bedside, for accompaniment !  
“ Does this give umbrage to a husband ? Death  
“ To the fool, and to the priest impunity !

- “ But no impunity to any friend 2075  
“ So simply over-loyal as these four  
“ Who made religion of their patron’s cause,  
“ Believed in him and did his bidding straight,  
“ Asked not one question but laid down the lives  
“ This Pope took,—all four lives together make 2080  
“ Just his own length of days,—so, dead they lie,  
“ As these were times when loyalty ’s a drug,  
“ And zeal in a subordinate too cheap  
“ And common to be saved when we spend life !  
“ Come, ’t is too much good breath we waste in words :  
“ The pardon, Holy Father ! Spare grimace, 2086  
“ Shrugs and reluctance ! Are not we the world,  
“ Art not thou Priam ? let soft culture plead  
“ Hecuba-like, ‘ *non tali* ’ (Virgil serves)  
“ ‘ *Auxilio*,’ and the rest ! Enough, it works ! 2090  
“ The Pope relaxes, and the Prince is loth,  
“ The father’s bowels yearn, the man’s will bends,  
“ Reply is apt. Our tears on tremble, hearts  
“ Big with a benediction, wait the word  
“ Shall circulate thro’ the city in a trice, 2095  
“ Set every window flaring, give each man  
“ O’ the mob his torch to wave for gratitude.  
“ Pronounce then, for our breath and patience fail ! ”

I will, Sirs : but a voice other than yours  
Quickens my spirit. “ *Quis pro Domino ?* ” 2100  
“ Who is upon the Lord’s side ? ” asked the Count.  
I, who write—

“ On receipt of this command,  
“ Acquaint Count Guido and his fellows four  
“ They die to-morrow : could it be to-night, 2105  
“ The better, but the work to do, takes time.  
“ Set with all diligence a scaffold up,  
“ Not in the customary place, by Bridge  
“ Saint Angelo, where die the common sort ;  
“ But since the man is noble, and his peers 2110  
“ By predilection haunt the People’s Square,  
“ There let him be beheaded in the midst,  
“ And his companions hanged on either side :  
“ So shall the quality see, fear and learn.  
“ All which work takes time : till to-morrow, then, 2115  
“ Let there be prayer incessant for the five ! ”

For the main criminal I have no hope  
Except in such a suddenness of fate.  
I stood at Naples once, a night so dark  
I could have scarce conjectured there was earth 2120  
Anywhere, sky or sea or world at all :

But the night's black was burst through by a blaze—  
Thunder struck blow on blow, earth groaned and bore,  
Through her whole length of mountain visible :  
There lay the city thick and plain with spires,                   2125  
And, like a ghost disshrouded, white the sea.  
So may the truth be flashed out by one blow,  
And Guido see, one instant, and be saved.  
Else I avert my face, nor follow him  
Into that sad obscure sequestered state                   2130  
Where God unmakes but to remake the soul  
He else made first in vain ; which must not be.  
Enough, for I may die this very night :  
And how should I dare die, this man let live?  
  
Carry this forthwith to the Governor !                   2135

XI.

G U I D O.

You are the Cardinal Acciaiuoli, and you,  
Abate Panciatichi—two good Tuscan names :  
Acciaiuoli—ah, your ancestor it was,  
Built the huge battlemented convent-block  
Over the little forky flashing Greve 5  
That takes the quick turn at the foot o' the hill  
Just as one first sees Florence : oh those days !  
'T is Ema, though, the other rivulet,  
The one-arched brown brick bridge yawns over,—yes,  
Gallop and go five minutes, and you gain 10  
The Roman Gate from where the Ema 's bridged :  
Kingfishers fly there : how I see the bend  
O'erturreted by Certosa which he built,

That Senescal (we styled him) of your House !  
I do adjure you, help me, Sirs ! My blood 15  
Comes from as far a source : ought it to end  
This way, by leakage through their scaffold-planks  
Into Rome's sink where her red refuse runs ?  
Sirs, I beseech you by blood-sympathy,  
If there be any vile experiment 20  
In the air,—if this your visit simply prove,  
When all 's done, just a well-intentioned trick,  
That tries for truth truer than truth itself,  
By startling up a man, ere break of day,  
To tell him he must die at sunset,—pshaw ! 25  
That man's a Franceschini ; feel his pulse,  
Laugh at your folly, and let 's all go sleep !  
You have my last word,—innocent am I  
As Innocent my Pope and murderer,  
Innocent as a babe, as Mary's own, 30  
As Mary's self,—I said, say and repeat,—  
And why, then, should I die twelve hours hence ? I—  
Whom, not twelve hours ago, the gaoler bade  
Turn to my straw-truss, settle and sleep sound  
That I might wake the sooner, promptlier pay 35  
His due of meat-and-drink-indulgence, cross  
His palm with fee of the good-hand, beside,



As gallants use who go at large again !  
For why ? All honest Rome approved my part ;  
Whoever owned wife, sister, daughter,—nay, 40  
Mistress,—had any shadow of any right  
That looks like right, and, all the more resolved,  
Held it with tooth and nail,—these manly men  
Approved ! I being for Rome, Rome was for me !  
Then, there 's the point reserved, the subterfuge 45  
My lawyers held by, kept for last resource,  
Firm should all else,—the impossible fancy !—fail,  
And sneaking burgess-spirit win the day :  
The knaves ! One plea at least would hold,—they  
laughed,—  
One grappling-iron scratch the bottom-rock 50  
Even should the middle mud let anchor go !  
I hooked my cause on to the Clergy's,—plea  
Which, even if law tipped off my hat and plume,  
Revealed my priestly tonsure, saved me so.  
The Pope moreover, this old Innocent, 55  
Being so meek and mild and merciful,  
So fond o' the poor and so fatigued of earth,  
So . . fifty thousand devils in deepest hell !  
Why must he cure us of our strange conceit  
Of the angel in man's likeness, that we loved 60

And looked should help us at a pinch? He help?  
He pardon? Here 's his mind and message—death!  
Thank the good Pope! Now, is he good in this,  
Never mind, Christian,—no such stuff 's extant,—  
But will my death do credit to his reign, 65  
Show he both lived and let live, so was good?  
Cannot I live if he but like? “The law!”  
Why, just the law gives him the very chance,  
The precise leave to let my life alone,  
Which the archangelic soul of him (he says) 70  
Yearns after! Here they drop it in his palm,  
My lawyers, capital o' the cursed kind,—  
Drop life to take and hold and keep: but no!  
He sighs, shakes head, refuses to shut hand,  
Motions away the gift they bid him grasp, 75  
And of the coyness comes—that off I run  
And down I go, he best knows whither! mind,  
He knows, who sets me rolling all the same!  
Disinterested Vicar of our Lord,  
This way he abrogates and disallows, 80  
Nullifies and ignores,—reverts in fine  
To the good and right, in detriment of me!  
Talk away! Will you have the naked truth?  
He 's sick of his life's supper,—swallowed lies:

So, hobbling bedward, needs must ease his maw 85  
Just where I sit o' the door-sill. Sir Abate,  
Can you do nothing? Friends, we used to frisk :  
What of this sudden slash in a friend's face,  
This cut across our good companionship  
That showed its front so gay when both were young ? 90  
Were not we put into a beaten path,  
Bid pace the world, we nobles born and bred,  
We body of friends with each his scutcheon full  
Of old achievement and impunity,—  
Taking the laugh of morn and Sol's salute 95  
As forth we fared, pricked on to breathe our steeds  
And take equestrian sport over the green  
Under the blue, across the crop,—what care ?  
If we went prancing up hill and down dale,  
In and out of the level and the straight, 100  
By the bit of pleasant byeway, where was harm ?  
Still Sol salutes me and the morning laughs :  
I see my grandsire's hoof-prints,—point the spot  
Where he drew rein, slipped saddle, and stabbed knave  
For daring throw gibe—much less, stone—from pale : 105  
Then back, and on, and up with the cavalcade.  
Just so wend we, now canter, now converse,  
Till, 'mid the jauncing pride and jaunty port,

Something of a sudden jerks at somebody—

A dagger is out, a flashing cut and thrust, 110

Because I play some prank my grandsire played,

And here I sprawl: where is the company? Gone!

A trot and a trample! only I lie trapped,

Writhe in a certain novel springe just set

By the good old Pope: I 'm first prize. Warn me?

Why? 115

Apprise me that the law o' the game is changed?

Enough that I 'm a warning, as I writhe,

To all and each my fellows of the file,

And make law plain henceforward past mistake,

"For such a prank, death is the penalty!" 120

Pope the Five Hundredth (what do I know or care?)

Deputes your Eminency and Abateship

To announce that, twelve hours from this time, he  
needs

I just essay upon my body and soul

The virtue of his brand-new engine, prove 125

Represser of the pranksome! I 'm the first!

Thanks. Do you know what teeth you mean to try

The sharpness of, on this soft neck and throat?

I know it,—I have seen and hate it,—ay,

As you shall, while I tell you! Let me talk, 130

Or leave me, at your pleasure ! talk I must :  
What is your visit but my lure to talk ?  
Nay, you have something to disclose ?—a smile,  
At end of the forced sternness, means to mock  
The heart-beats here ? I call your two hearts stone !  
Is your charge to stay with me till I die ? 136  
Be tacit as your bench, then ! Use your ears,  
I use my tongue : how glibly yours will run  
At pleasant supper-time . . God's curse ! . . to-night  
When all the guests jump up, begin so brisk 140  
“ Welcome, his Eminence who shrived the wretch !  
“ Now we shall have the Abate's story ! ”

Life !

How I could spill this overplus of mine  
Among those hoar-haired, shrunk-shanked, odds and  
ends  
Of body and soul, old age is chewing dry ! 146  
Those windle-straws that stare while purblind death  
Mows here, mows there, makes hay of juicy me,  
And misses just the bunch of withered weed,  
Would brighten hell and streak its smoke with flame !  
How the life, I could shed yet never shrink, 151  
Would drench their stalks with sap like grass in May !

Is it not terrible, I entreat you, Sirs?  
Such manifold and plenitudinous life,  
Prompt at death's menace to give blow for threat, 155  
Answer his "Be thou not!" by "Thus I am!"—  
Terrible so to be alive yet die?

How I live, how I see! so,—how I speak!  
Lucidity of soul unlocks the lips:  
I never had the words at will before. 160  
How I see all my folly at a glance!  
"A man requires a woman and a wife:"  
There was my folly; I believed the saw:  
I knew that just myself concerned myself,  
Yet needs must look for what I seemed to lack, 165  
In a woman,—why, the woman's in the man!  
Fools we are, how we learn things when too late!  
Overmuch life turns round my woman-side;  
The male and female in me, mixed before,  
Settle of a sudden: I'm my wife outright 170  
In this unmanly appetite for truth,  
This careless courage as to consequence,  
This instantaneous sight through things and through,  
This voluble rhetoric, if you please,—'t is she!  
Here you have that Pompilia whom I slew, 175

Also the folly for which I slew her !

Fool !

And, fool-like, what is it I wander from ?

What did I say of your sharp iron tooth ?

Ah,—that I know the hateful thing ! this way. 180

I chanced to stroll forth, many a good year gone,

One warm Spring eve in Rome, and unaware

Looking, mayhap, to count what stars were out,

Came on your fine axe in a frame, that falls

And so cuts off a man's head underneath, 185

Mannaia,—thus we made acquaintance first :

Out of the way, in a bye-part o' the town,

At the Mouth-of-Truth o' the river-side, you know :

One goes by the Capitol : and wherefore coy,

Retiring out of crowded noisy Rome ? 190

Because a very little time ago

It had done service, chopped off head from trunk,

Belonging to a fellow whose poor house

The thing must make a point to stand before.

Felice Whatsoever-was-the-name 195

Who stabled buffaloes and so gained bread,

(Our clowns unyoke them in the ground hard by)

And, after use of much improper speech,

Had struck at Duke Some-title-or-other's face,

Because he kidnapped, carried away and kept 200  
Felice's sister who would sit and sing  
I' the filthy doorway while she plaited fringe  
To deck the brutes with,—on their gear it goes,—  
The good girl with the velvet in her voice.  
So did the Duke, so did Felice, so 205  
Did Justice, intervening with her axe.  
There the man-mutilating engine stood  
At ease, both gay and grim, like a Swiss guard  
Off duty,—purified itself as well,  
Getting dry, sweet and proper for next week,— 210  
And doing incidental good, 't was hoped  
To the rough lesson-lacking populace  
Who now and then, forsooth, must right their wrongs !  
There stood the twelve-foot-square of scaffold, railed  
Considerately round to elbow-height, 215  
For fear an officer should tumble thence  
And sprain his ankle and be lame a month,  
Through starting when the axe fell and head too !  
Railed likewise were the steps whereby 't was reached.  
All of it painted red : red, in the midst, 220  
Ran up two narrow tall beams barred across,  
Since from the summit, some twelve feet to reach,  
The iron plate with the sharp shearing edge



Had slammed, jerked, shot, slid,—I shall soon find which !  
And so lay quiet, fast in its fit place, 225  
The wooden half-moon collar, now eclipsed  
By the blade which blocked its curvature : apart,  
The other half,—the under half-moon board  
Which, helped by this, completes a neck's embrace,—  
Joined to a sort of desk that wheels aside 230  
Out of the way when done with,—down you kneel,  
In you 're pushed, over you the other drops,  
Tight you 're clipped, whiz, there 's the blade cleaves its  
best,  
Out trundles body, down flops head on floor,  
And where 's your soul gone ? That, too, I shall find !  
This kneeling-place was red, red, never fear ! 236  
But only slimy-like with paint, not blood,  
For why ? a decent pitcher stood at hand,  
A broad dish to hold sawdust, and a broom  
By some unnamed utensil,—scraper-rake,— 240  
Each with a conscious air of duty done.  
Underneath, loungers,—boys and some few men,—  
Discoursed this platter, named the other tool,  
Just as, when grooms tie up and dress a steed,  
Boys lounge and look on, and elucubrate 245  
What the round brush is used for, what the square,—

So was explained—to me the skill-less then—  
The manner of the grooming for next world  
Undergone by Felice What's-his-name.  
There 's no such lovely month in Rome as May— 250  
May's crescent is no half-moon of red plank,  
And came now tilting o'er the wave i' the west,  
One greenish-golden sea, right 'twixt those bars  
Of the engine—I began acquaintance with,  
Understood, hated, hurried from before, 255  
To have it out of sight and cleanse my soul !  
Here it is all again, conserved for use :  
Twelve hours hence, I may know more, not hate worse.

That young May-moon-month ! Devils of the deep !  
Was not a Pope then Pope as much as now ? 260  
Used not he chirrup o'er the Merry Tales,  
Chuckle,—his nephew so exact the wag  
To play a jealous cullion such a trick  
As wins the wife i' the pleasant story ! Well ?  
Why do things change ? Wherefore is Rome un-Romed ?  
I tell you, ere Felice's corpse was cold, 266  
The Duke, that night, threw wide his palace-doors,  
Received the compliments o' the quality,  
For justice done him,—bowed and smirked his best,

And in return passed round a pretty thing, 270  
A portrait of Felice's sister's self,  
Florid old rogue Albano's masterpiece,  
As—better than virginity in rags—  
Bouncing Europa on the back o' the bull :  
They laughed and took their road the safelier home.  
Ah, but times change, there 's quite another Pope, 276  
I do the Duke's deed, take Felice's place,  
And, being no Felice, lout and clout,  
Stomach but ill the phrase " I lose my head !"  
How euphemistic ! Lose what ? Lose your ring, 280  
Your snuff-box, tablets, kerchief !—but, your head ?  
I learnt the process at an early age ;  
'T was useful knowledge, in those same old days,  
To know the way a head is set on neck.  
My fencing master urged " Would you excel ? 285  
" Rest not content with mere bold give-and-guard,  
" Nor pink the antagonist somehow-anyhow !  
" See me dissect a little, and know your game !  
" Only anatomy makes a thrust the thing."  
Oh Cardinal, those lithe live necks of ours ! 290  
Here go the vertebræ, here's *Atlas*, here  
*Axis*, and here the symphyses stop short,  
So wisely and well,—as, o'er a corpse, we cant,—

And here 's the silver cord which . . . what 's our word ?  
Depends from the gold bowl, which loosed (not "lost")  
Lets us from heaven to hell,—one chop, we 're loose !  
" And not much pain i' the process," quoth the sage :  
Who told him ? Not Felice's ghost, I think !  
Such "losing" is scarce Mother Nature's mode.  
She fain would have cord ease itself away, 300  
Worn to a thread by threescore years and ten,  
Snap while we slumber : that seems bearable :  
I 'm told one clot of blood extravasate  
Ends one as certainly as Roland's sword,—  
One drop of lymph suffused proves Oliver's mace,— 305  
Intruding, either of the pleasant pair,  
On the arachnoid tunic of my brain.  
That 's Nature's way of loosing cord !—but Art,  
How of Art's process with the engine here,  
When bowl and cord alike are crushed across, 310  
Bored between, bruised through ? Why, if Fagon's self,  
The French Court's pride, that famed practitioner,  
Would pass his cold pale lightning of a knife,  
Pistoja-ware, adroit 'twixt joint and joint,  
With just a " See how facile, gentlefolks !" — 315  
The thing were not so bad to bear ! Brute force  
Cuts as he comes, breaks in, breaks on, breaks out

O' the hard and soft of you : is that the same ?  
A lithe snake thrids the hedge, makes throb no leaf :  
A heavy ox sets chest to brier and branch, 320  
Bursts somehow through, and leaves one hideous hole  
Behind him !

And why, why must this needs be ?  
Oh, if men were but good ! They are not good,  
Nowise like Peter : people called him rough, 325  
But if, as I left Rome, I spoke the Saint,  
—" *Petrus, quo vadis ?* "—doubtless, I should hear,  
" To free the prisoner and forgive his fault !  
" I plucked the absolute dead from God's own bar,  
" And raised up Dorcas,—why not rescue thee ? " 330  
What would cost one such nullifying word ?  
If Innocent succeeds to Peter's place,  
Let him think Peter's thought, speak Peter's speech !  
I say, he is bound to it : friends, how say you ?  
Concede I be all one bloodguiltiness 335  
And mystery of murder in the flesh,  
Why should that fact keep the Pope's mouth shut fast ?  
He execrates my crime,—good !—sees hell yawn  
One inch from the red plank's end which I press,—  
Nothing is better ! What's the consequence ? 340

How should a Pope proceed that knows his cue?  
Why, leave me linger out my minute here,  
Since close on death comes judgment and comes doom,  
Nor crib at dawn its pittance from a sheep  
Destined ere dewfall to be butcher's-meat ! 345  
Think, Sirs, if I have done you any harm,  
And you require the natural revenge,  
Suppose, and so intend to poison me,  
—Just as you take and slip into my draught  
The paperful of powder that clears scores, 350  
You notice on my brow a certain blue :  
How you both overset the wine at once !  
How you both smile ! “ Our enemy has the plague !  
“ Twelve hours hence he 'll be scraping his bones bare  
“ Of that intolerable flesh, and die, 355  
“ Frenzied with pain : no need for poison here !  
“ Step aside and enjoy the spectacle ! ”  
Tender for souls are you, Pope Innocent !  
Christ's maxim is—one soul outweighs the world :  
Respite me, save a soul, then, curse the world ! 360  
“ No,” venerable sire, I hear you smirk,  
“ No : for Christ's gospel changes names, not things,  
“ Renews the obsolete, does nothing more !  
“ Our fire-new gospel is re-tinkered law,

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" Our mercy, justice,—Jove 's rechristened God,— 365  
 " Nay, whereas, in the popular conceit,  
 " 'T is pity that old harsh Law somehow limps,  
 " Although Law's day be done, lingers on earth,—  
 " Else would benignant Gospel interpose,  
 " Not furtively as now, but bold and frank 370  
 " O'erflutter us with healing in her wings,  
 " Law being harshness, Gospel only love—  
 " We tell the people, on the contrary,—  
 " Gospel takes up the rod which Law lets fall ;  
 " Mercy is vigilant when justice sleeps ! 375  
 " Does Law permit a taste of Gospel-grace ?  
 " The secular arm allow the spiritual power  
 " To act for once ?—no compliment so fine  
 " As that our Gospel handsomely turn harsh,  
 " Thrust victim back on Law the nice and coy ! " 380  
 Yes, you do say so,—else you would forgive  
 Me, whom Law does not touch but tosses you !  
 Do n't think to put on the professional face !  
 You know what I know,—casuists as you are,  
 Each nerve must creep, each hair start, sting and stand,  
 At such illogical inconsequence ! 386  
 Dear my friends, do but see ! A murder 's tried,  
 There are two parties to the cause : I 'm one,

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—Defend myself, as somebody must do :

I have the best o' the battle : that 's a fact, 390

Simple fact,—fancies find no place just now.

What though half Rome condemned me ? Half approved :

And, none disputes, the luck is mine at last,

All Rome, i' the main, acquitting me : whereon,

What has the Pope to ask but “ How finds Law ? ” 395

“ I find,” replies Law, “ I have erred this while :

“ Guilty or guiltless, Guido proves a priest,

“ No layman : he is therefore yours, not mine :

“ I bound him : loose him, you whose will is Christ's ! ”

And now what does this Vicar of our Lord, 400

Shepherd o' the flock,—one of whose charge bleats sore

For crook's help from the quag wherein it drowns ?

Law suffers him employ the crumpled end,—

His pleasure is to turn staff, use the point,

And thrust the shuddering sheep, he calls a wolf, 405

Back and back, down and down to where hell gapes !

“ Guiltless,” cries Law—“ Guilty ” corrects the Pope !

“ Guilty,” for the whim's sake ! “ Guilty,” he somehow  
thinks,

And anyhow says : 't is truth ; he dares not lie !

Others should do the lying. That 's the cause 410

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Brings you both here : I ought in decency  
Confess to you that I deserve my fate,  
Am guilty, as the Pope thinks,—ay, to the end,  
Keep up the jest, lie on, lie ever, lie  
I' the latest gasp of me ! What reason, Sirs ? 415  
Because to-morrow will succeed to-day  
For you, though not for me : and if I stick  
Still to the truth, declare with my last breath,  
I die an innocent and murdered man,—  
Why, there 's the tongue of Rome will wag a-pace 420  
This time to-morrow,—do n't I hear the talk !  
“ So, to the last he proved impenitent ?  
“ Pagans have said as much of martyred saints !  
“ Law demurred, washed her hands of the whole case.  
“ Prince Somebody said this, Duke Something, that. 425  
“ Doubtless the man 's dead, dead enough, do n't fear !  
“ But, hang it, what if there have been a spice,  
“ A touch of . . eh ? You see, the Pope 's so old,  
“ Some of us add, obtuse,—age never slips  
“ The chance of shoving youth to face death first !” 430  
And so on. Therefore to suppress such talk  
You two come here, entreat I tell you lies,  
And end, the edifying way. I end,  
Telling the truth ! Your self-styled shepherd thieves !

A thief—and how thieves hate the wolves we know: 435  
Damage to theft, damage to thrift, all 's one !  
The red hand is sworn foe of the black jaw !  
That 's only natural, that 's right enough :  
But why the wolf should compliment the thief  
With shepherd's title, bark out life in thanks, 440  
And, spiteless, lick the prong that spits him,—eh,  
Cardinal ? My Abate, scarcely thus !  
There, let my sheepskin-garb, a curse on 't, go—  
Leave my teeth free if I must show my shag !  
Repent ? What good shall follow ? If I pass 445  
Twelve hours repenting, will that fact hold fast  
The thirteenth at the horrid dozen's end ?  
If I fall forthwith at your feet, gnash, tear,  
Foam, rave, to give your story the due grace,  
Will that assist the engine half-way back 450  
Into its hiding-house ?—boards, shaking now,  
Bone against bone, like some old skeleton bat  
That wants, at winter's end, to wake and prey !  
Will howling put the spectre back to sleep ?  
Ah, but I misconceive your object, Sirs ! 455  
Since I want new life like the creature,—life  
Being done with here, begins i' the world away :  
I shall next have “ Come, mortals, and be judged ! ”

There 's but a minute betwixt this and then :  
So, quick, be sorry since it saves my soul ! 460  
Sirs, truth shall save it, since no lies assist !  
Hear the truth, you, whatever you style yourselves,  
Civilization and society !  
Come, one good grapple, I with all the world !  
Dying in cold blood is the desperate thing ; 465  
The angry heart explodes, bears off in blaze  
The indignant soul, and I 'm combustion-ripe.  
Why, you intend to do your worst with me !  
That 's in your eyes ! You dare no more than death,  
And mean no less. I must make up my mind ! 470  
So Pietro,—when I chased him here and there,  
Morsel by morsel cut away the life  
I loathed,—cried for just respite to confess  
And save his soul : much respite did I grant !  
Why grant me respite who deserve my doom ? 475  
Me—who engaged to play a prize, fight you,  
Knowing you arms, and foil you, trick for trick,  
At rapier-fence, your match and, may be, more.  
I knew that if I chose sin certain sins,  
Solace my lusts out of the regular way 480  
Prescribed me, I should find you in the path,  
Have to try skill with a redoubted foe ;

You would lunge, I would parry, and make end.  
At last, occasion of a murder comes :  
We cross blades, I, for all my brag, break guard, 485  
And in goes the cold iron at my breast,  
Out at my back, and end is made of me.  
You stand confessed the adroiter swordsman,—ay,  
But on your triumph you increase, it seems,  
Want more of me than lying flat on face : 490  
I ought to raise my ruined head, allege  
Not simply I pushed worse blade o' the pair,  
But my antagonist dispensed with steel !  
There was no passage of arms, you looked me low,  
With brow and eye abolished cut-and-thrust 495  
Nor used the vulgar weapon ! This chance scratch,  
This incidental hurt, this sort of hole  
I' the heart of me ? I stumbled, got it so !  
Fell on my own sword as a bungler may !  
Yourself proscribe such heathen tools, and trust 500  
To the naked virtue : it was virtue stood  
Unarmed and awed me,—on my brow there burned  
Crime out so plainly, intolerably red,  
That I was fain to cry—“ Down to the dust  
“ With me, and bury there brow, brand and all ! ” 505  
Law had essayed the adventure,—but what 's Law ?

Morality exposed the Gorgon shield !

Morality and Religion conquer me.

If Law sufficed would you come here, entreat

I supplement law, and confess forsooth ? 510

Did not the Trial show things plain enough ?

“ Ah, but a word of the man’s very self

“ Would somehow put the keystone in its place

“ And crown the arch !” Then take the word you want !

I say that, long ago, when things began, 515

All the world made agreement, such and such

Were pleasure-giving profit-bearing acts,

But henceforth extra-legal, nor to be :

You must not kill the man whose death would please

And profit you, unless his life stop yours 520

Plainly, and need so be put aside :

Get the thing by a public course, by law,

Only no private bloodshed as of old !

All of us, for the good of every one,

Renounced such licence and conformed to law : 525

Who breaks law, breaks pact, therefore, helps himself

To pleasure and profit over and above the due,

And must pay forfeit,—pain beyond his share :

For, pleasure being the sole good in the world,

Anyone's pleasure turns to someone's pain, 530  
So, law must watch for everyone,—say we,  
Who call things wicked that give too much joy,  
And nickname mere reprisal, envy makes,  
Punishment : quite right ! thus the world goes round.  
I, being well aware such pact there was, 535  
I, in my time who found advantage come  
Of law's observance and crime's penalty,—  
Who, but for wholesome fear law bred in friends,  
Had doubtless given example long ago,  
Furnished forth some friend's pleasure with my pain,  
And, by my death, pieced out his scanty life,— 541  
I could not, for that foolish life of me,  
Help risking law's infringement,—I broke bond,  
And needs must pay price,—wherefore, here 's my head,  
Flung with a flourish ! But, repentance too ? 545  
But pure and simple sorrow for law's breach  
Rather than blunderer's-ineptitude ?  
Cardinal, no ! Abate, scarcely thus !  
'T is the fault, not that I dared try a fall  
With Law and straightway am found undermost, 550  
But that I failed to see, above man's law,  
God's precept you, the Christians, recognize ?  
Colly my cow ! Do n't fidget, Cardinal !

Abate, cross your breast and count your beads  
And exorcize the devil, for here he stands 555  
And stiffens in the bristly nape of neck,  
Daring you drive him hence ! You, Christians both ?  
I say, if ever was such faith at all  
Born in the world, by your community  
Suffered to live its little tick of time, 560  
'T is dead of age, now, ludicrously dead ;  
Honour its ashes, if you be discreet,  
In epitaph only ! For, concede its death,  
Allow extinction, you may boast unchecked  
What feats the thing did in a crazy land 565  
At a fabulous epoch,—treat your faith, that way,  
Just as you treat your relics : “ Here ’s a shred  
“ Of saintly flesh, a scrap of blessed bone,  
“ Raised King Cophetua, who was dead, to life  
“ In Mesopotamy twelve centuries since, 570  
“ Such was its virtue ! ”—twangs the Sacristan,  
Holding the shrine-box up, with hands like feet  
Because of gout in every finger-joint :  
Does he bethink him to reduce one knob,  
Allay one twinge by touching what he vaunts ? 575  
I think he half uncrooks fist to catch fee,  
But, for the grace, the quality of cure,—

Cophetua was the man put that to proof !  
Not otherwise, your faith is shrined and shown  
And shamed at once : you banter while you bow ! 580  
Do you dispute this? Come, a monster-laugh,  
A madman's laugh, allowed his Carnival  
Later ten days than when all Rome, but he,  
Laughed at the candle-contest : mine's alight,  
'T is just it sputter till the puff o' the Pope 585  
End it to-morrow and the world turn Ash.  
Come, thus I wave a wand and bring to pass  
In a moment, in the twinkle of an eye, .  
What but that—feigning everywhere grows fact,  
Professors turn possessors, realize 590  
The faith they play with as a fancy now,  
And bid it operate, have full effect  
On every circumstance of life, to-day,  
In Rome,—faith's flow set free at fountain-head !  
Now, you 'll own, at this present when I speak, 595  
Before I work the wonder, there 's no man  
Woman or child in Rome, faith's fountain-head,  
But might, if each were minded, realize  
Conversely unbelief, faith's opposite—  
Set it to work on life unflinchingly, 600  
Yet give no symptom of an outward change :



Why should things change because men disbelieve?  
What 's incompatible, in the whited tomb,  
With bones and rottenness one inch below?  
What saintly act is done in Rome to-day 605  
But might be prompted by the devil,—“ is ”  
I say not,—“ has been, and again may be,”—  
I do say, full i' the face o' the crucifix  
You try to stop my mouth with ! Off with it !  
Look in your own heart, if your soul have eyes ! 610  
You shall see reason why, though faith were fled,  
Unbelief still might work the wires and move  
Man, the machine, to play a faithful part.  
Preside your college, Cardinal, in your cape,  
Or,—having got above his head, grown Pope,— 615  
Abate, gird your loins and wash my feet !  
Do you suppose I am at loss at all  
Why you crook, why you cringe, why fast or feast ?  
Praise, blame, sit, stand, lie or go !—all of it,  
In each of you, purest unbelief may prompt, 620  
And wit explain to who has eyes to see.  
But, lo, I wave wand, make the false the true !  
Here 's Rome believes in Christianity !  
What an explosion, how the fragments fly  
Of what was surface, mask and make-believe ! 625

Begin now,—look at this Pope's-halberdier  
In wasp-like black and yellow foolery !  
He, doing duty at the corridor,  
Wakes from a muse and stands convinced of sin !  
Down he flings halbert, leaps the passage-length, 630  
Pushes into the presence, pantingly  
Submits the extreme peril of the case  
To the Pope's self,—whom in the world beside?—  
And the Pope breaks talk with ambassador,  
Bids aside bishop, wills the whole world wait 635  
Till he secure that prize, outweighs the world,  
A soul, relieve the sentry of his qualm !  
His Altitude the Referendary,—  
Robed right, and ready for the usher's word  
To pay devoir,—is, of all times, just then 640  
'Ware of a master-stroke of argument  
Will cut the spinal cord . . ugh, ugh ! . . I mean,  
Paralyse Molinism for evermore !  
Straight he leaves lobby, trundles, two and two,  
Down steps to reach home, write, if but a word 645  
Shall end the impudence: he leaves who likes  
Go pacify the Pope : there 's Christ to serve !  
How otherwise would men display their zeal ?  
If the same sentry had the least surmise

A powder-barrel 'neath the pavement lay 650  
In neighbourhood with what might prove a match,  
Meant to blow sky-high Pope and presence both—  
Would he not break through courtiers, rank and file,  
Bundle up, bear off and save body so,  
The Pope, no matter for his priceless soul? 655  
There 's no fool's-freak here, nought to soundly swinge,  
Only a man in earnest, you 'll so praise  
And pay and prate about, that earth shall ring !  
Had thought possessed the Referendary  
His jewel-case at home was left ajar, 660  
What' would be wrong in running, robes awry,  
To be beforehand with the pilferer ?  
What talk then of indecent haste ? Which means,  
That both these, each in his degree, would do  
Just that,—for a comparative nothing's sake, 665  
And thereby gain approval and reward,—  
Which, done for what Christ says is worth the world,  
Procures the doer curses, cuffs and kicks.  
I call such difference 'twixt act and act,  
Sheer lunacy unless your truth on lip, 670  
Be recognized a lie in heart of you !  
How do you all act, promptly or in doubt,  
When there 's a guest poisoned at supper-time

And he sits chatting on with spot on cheek?  
“ Pluck him by the skirt, and round him in the ears, 675  
“ Have at him by the beard, warn anyhow !”  
Good, and this other friend that ’s cheat and thief  
And dissolute,—go stop the devil’s feast,  
Withdraw him from the imminent hell-fire !  
Why, for your life, you dare not tell your friend 680  
“ You lie, and I admonish you for Christ !”  
Who yet dare seek that same man at the Mass  
To warn him—on his knees, and tinkle near,—  
He left a cask a-tilt, a tap unturned,  
The Trebbian running : what a grateful jump 685  
Out of the Church rewards your vigilance !  
Perform that self-same service just a thought  
More maladroitly,—since a bishop sits  
At function !—and he budes not, bites lip,—  
“ You see my case : how can I quit my post ? 690  
“ He has an eye to any such default.  
“ See to it, neighbour, I beseech your love !”  
He and you know the relative worth of things,  
What is permissible or inopportune.  
Contort your brows ! You know I speak the truth : 695  
Gold is called gold, and dross called dross, i’ the Book :  
Gold you let lie and dross pick up and prize !

—Despite your muster of some fifty monks  
And nuns a-maundering here and mumping there,  
Who could, and on occasion would, spurn dross, 700  
Clutch gold, and prove their faith a fact so far,—  
I grant you ! Fifty times the number squeak  
And gibber in the madhouse—firm of faith,  
This fellow, that his nose supports the moon,  
The other, that his straw hat crowns him Pope : 705  
Does that prove all the world outside insane ?  
Do fifty miracle-mongers match the mob  
That acts on the frank faithless principle,  
Born-baptized-and-bred Christian-atheists, each  
With just as much a right to judge as you,— 710  
As many senses in his soul, and nerves  
I' neck of him as I,—whom, soul and sense,  
Neck and nerve, you abolish presently,—  
I being the unit in creation now  
Who pay the Maker, in this speech of mine, 715  
A creature's duty, spend my last of breath  
In bearing witness, even by my worst fault,  
To the creature's obligation, absolute,  
Perpetual : my worst fault protests, " The faith  
" Claims all of me : I would give all she claims, 720  
" But for a spice of doubt : the risk 's too rash :

“ Double or quits, I play, but, all or nought,  
“ Exceeds my courage : therefore, I descend  
“ To the next faith with no dubiety—  
“ Faith in the present life, made last as long 725  
“ And prove as full of pleasure as may hap,  
“ Whatever pain it cause the world.” I ’m wrong?  
I ’ve had my life, whate’er I lose : I ’m right?  
I ’ve got the single good there was to gain.  
Entire faith, or else complete unbelief ! 730  
Aught between has my loathing and contempt,  
Mine and God’s also, doubtless : ask yourself,  
Cardinal, where and how you like a man !  
Why, either with your feet upon his head,  
Confessed your caudatory, or, at large, 735  
The stranger in the crowd who caps to you  
But keeps his distance,—why should he presume?  
You want no hanger-on and dropper-off,  
Now yours, and now not yours but quite his own,  
According as the sky looks black or bright. 740  
Just so I capped to and kept off from faith—  
You promised trudge behind through fair and foul,  
Yet leave i’ the lurch at the first spit of rain.  
Who holds to faith whenever rain begins?  
What does the father when his son lies dead, 745

The merchant when his money-bags take wing,  
The politician whom a rival ousts?  
No case but has its conduct, faith prescribes :  
Where 's the obedience that shall edify?  
Why, they laugh frankly in the face of faith 750  
And take the natural course,—this rends his hair  
Because his child is taken to God's breast,  
That gnashes teeth and raves at loss of trash  
Which rust corrupts and thieves break through and steal,  
And this, enabled to inherit earth 755  
Through meekness, curses till your blood runs cold !  
Down they all drop to my low level, ease  
Heart upon dungy earth that 's warm and soft,  
And let who will, attempt the altitudes.  
Each is the prodigal son of heavenly sire, 760  
Turning his nose up at the fatted calf,  
Fain to fill belly with the husks, we swine  
Did eat by born depravity of taste !

Enough of the hypocrites. But you, Sirs, you—  
Who never budged from litter where I lay, 765  
And buried snout i' the draff-box while I fed,  
Cried amen to my creed's one article—  
“ Get pleasure, 'scape pain,—give your preference

“ To the immediate good, for time is brief,  
“ And death ends good and ill and everything !        770  
“ What’s got is gained, what’s gained soon is gained twice,  
“ And,—inasmuch as faith gains most,—feign faith ! ”  
So did we brother-like pass word about :  
—You, now,—like bloody drunkards but half-drunk,  
Who fool men yet perceive men find them fools,—        775  
Vexed that a titter gains the gravest mouth,—  
O’ the sudden you must needs re-introduce  
Solemnity, straight sober undue mirth  
By a blow dealt your boon companion here  
Who, using the old licence, dreamed of harm        780  
No more than snow in harvest : yet it falls !  
You check the merriment effectually  
By pushing your abrupt machine i’ the midst,  
Making me Rome’s example : blood for wine !  
The general good needs that you chop and change !        785  
I may dislike the hocus-pocus,—Rome,  
The laughter-loving people, won’t they stare  
Chap-fallen !—while serious natures sermonize  
“ The magistrate, he beareth not the sword  
“ In vain ; who sins may taste its edge, we see ! ”        790  
Why my sin, drunkards ? Where have I abused  
Liberty, scandalized you all so much ?

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Who called me, who crooked finger till I came,  
Fool that I was, to join companionship ?  
I knew my own mind, meant to live my life, 795  
Elude your envy, or else make a stand,  
Take my own part and sell you my life dear.  
But it was " Fie ! No prejudice in the world  
" To the proper manly instinct ! Cast your lot  
" Into our lap, one genius ruled our births, 800  
" We 'll compass joy by concert ; take with us  
" The regular irregular way i' the wood ;  
" You 'll miss no game through riding breast by breast,  
" In this preserve, the Church's park and pale,  
" Rather than outside where the world lies waste ! " 805  
Come, if you said not that, did you say this ?  
Give plain and terrible warning, " Live, enjoy ?  
" Such life begins in death and ends in hell !  
" Dare you bid us assist your sins, us priests  
" Who hurry sin and sinners from the earth ? 810  
" No such delight for us, why then for you ?  
" Leave earth, seek heaven or find its opposite ! "  
Had you so warned me, not in lying words  
But veritable deeds with tongues of flame,  
That had been fair, that might have struck a man, 815  
Silenced the squabble between soul and sense,

Compelled him to make mind up, take one course  
Or the other, peradventure !—wrong or right,  
Foolish or wise, you would have been at least  
Sincere, no question,—forced me choose, indulge 820  
Or else renounce my instincts, still play wolf  
Or find my way submissive to your fold,  
Be red-crossed on my fleece, one sheep the more.  
But you as good as bade me wear sheep's wool  
Over wolf's skin, suck blood and hide the noise 825  
By mimicry of something like a bleat,—  
Whence it comes that because, despite my care,  
Because I smack my tongue too loud for once,  
Drop baaing, here 's the village up in arms !  
Have at the wolf's throat, you who hate the breed ! 830  
Oh, were it only open yet to choose—  
One little time more—whether I 'd be free  
Your foe, or subsidized your friend forsooth !  
Should not you get a growl through the white fangs  
In answer to your beckoning ! Cardinal, 835  
Abate, managers o' the multitude,  
I 'd turn your gloved hands to account, be sure !  
You should manipulate the coarse rough mob :  
'T is you I 'd deal directly with, not them,—  
Using your fears : why touch the thing myself 840

When I could see you hunt, and then cry "Shares !  
" Quarter the carcase or we quarrel ; come,  
" Here 's the world ready to see justice done !"  
Oh, it had been a desperate game, but game  
Wherein the winner's chance were worth the pains 845  
We 'd try conclusions !—at the worst, what worse  
Than this Mannaia-machine, each minute's talk  
Helps push an inch the nearer me ? Fool, fool !

You understand me and forgive, sweet Sirs ?  
I blame you, tear my hair and tell my woe— 850  
All 's but a flourish, figure of rhetoric !  
One must try each expedient to save life.  
One makes fools look foolisher fifty-fold  
By putting in their place men wise like you,  
To take the full force of an argument 855  
Would buffet their stolidity in vain.  
If you should feel aggrieved by the mere wind  
O' the blow that means to miss you and maul them,  
That 's my success ! Is it not folly, now,  
To say with folks, " A plausible defence— 860  
" We see through notwithstanding, and reject ? "  
Reject the plausible they do, these fools,  
Who never even make pretence to show

One point beyond its plausibility  
In favour of the best belief they hold ! 865  
“ Saint Somebody-or-other raised the dead : ”  
Did he ? How do you come to know as much ?  
“ Know it, what need ? The story’s plausible,  
“ Avouched for by a martyrologist,  
“ And why should good men sup on cheese and leeks  
“ On such a saint’s day, if there were no saint ? ” 871  
I praise the wisdom of these fools, and straight  
Tell them my story—“ plausible, but false ! ”  
False, to be sure ! What else can story be  
That runs—a young wife tired of an old spouse, 875  
Found a priest whom she fled away with,—both  
Took their full pleasure in the two-day’s flight,  
Which a grey-headed greyer-hearted pair,  
(Whose best boast was, their life had been a lie)  
Helped for the love they bore all liars. Oh, 880  
Here incredulity begins ! Indeed ?  
Allow then, were no one point strictly true,  
There’s that I’ the tale might seem like truth at least  
To the unlucky husband,—jaundiced patch,—  
Jealousy maddens people, why not him ? 885  
Say, he was maddened, so forgivable !  
Humanity pleads that though the wife were true,

The priest true, and the pair of liars true,  
They might seem false to one man in the world !  
A thousand gnats make up a serpent's sting, 890  
And many sly soft stimulants to wrath  
Compose a formidable wrong at last,  
That gets called easily by some one name  
Not applicable to the single parts,  
And so draws down a general revenge, 895  
Excessive if you take crime, fault by fault.  
Jealousy ! I have known a score of plays,  
Were listened to and laughed at in my time  
As like the everyday-life on all sides,  
Wherein the husband, mad as a March hare, 900  
Suspected all the world contrived his shame.  
What did the wife ? The wife kissed both eyes blind,  
Explained away ambiguous circumstance,  
And while she held him captive by the hand,  
Crowned his head,—you know what 's the mockery,—  
By half her body behind the curtain. That 's 906  
Nature now ! That 's the subject of a piece  
I saw in Vallombrosa Convent, made  
Expressly to teach men what marriage was !  
But say " Just so did I misapprehend, 910  
" Imagine she deceived me to my face ! "

And that 's pretence too easily seen through !  
All those eyes of all husbands in all plays,  
At stare like one expanded peacock-tail,  
Are laughed at for pretending to be keen 915  
While horn-blind : but the moment I step forth—  
Oh, I must needs o' the sudden prove a lynx  
And look the heart, that stone-wall, through and through !  
Such an eye, God's may be,—not yours nor mine.

Yes, presently . . what hour is fleeting now ? 920  
When you cut earth away from under me,  
I shall be left alone with, pushed beneath  
Some such an apparitional dread orb  
As the eye of God, since such an eye there glares :  
I fancy it go filling up the void 925  
Above my mote-self it devours, or what  
Proves wrath, immensity wreaks on nothingness.  
Just, how I felt once, couching through the dark,  
Hard by Vittiano ; young I was, and gay,  
And wanting to trap fieldfares : first a spark 930  
Tipped a bent, as a mere dew-globule might  
Any stiff grass-stalk on the meadow,—this  
Grew fiercer, flamed out full, and proved the sun.  
What do I want with proverbs, precepts here ?

Away with man ! What shall I say to God ? 935  
This, if I find the tongue and keep the mind—  
“ Do Thou wipe out the being of me, and smear  
“ This soul from off Thy white of things, I blot !  
“ I am one huge and sheer mistake,—whose fault ?  
“ Not mine at least, who did not make myself ! ” 940  
Someone declares my wife excused me so !  
Perhaps she knew what argument to use.  
Grind your teeth, Cardinal, Abate, writhe !  
What else am I to cry out in my rage,  
Unable to repent one particle 945  
O’ the past ? Oh, how I wish some cold wise man  
Would dig beneath the surface which you scrape,  
Deal with the depths, pronounce on my desert  
Groundedly ! I want simple sober sense,  
That asks, before it finishes with a dog, 950  
Who taught the dog that trick you hang him for ?  
You both persist to call that act a crime,  
Sense would call . . . yes, I do assure you, Sirs, . . .  
A blunder ! At the worst, I stood in doubt  
On cross-road, took one path of many paths : 955  
It leads to the red thing, we all see now,  
But nobody at first saw : one primrose  
In bank, one singing-bird in bush, the less,

Had warned me from such wayfare, let me prove !  
Put me back to the cross-road, start afresh ! 960  
Advise me when I take the first false step !  
Give me my wife : how should I use my wife,  
Love her or hate her ? Prompt my action now !  
There she is, there she stands alive and pale,  
The thirteen-years'-old child, with milk for blood, 965  
Pompilia Comparini, as at first,  
Which first is only four brief years ago !  
I stand too in the little ground-floor room  
O' the father's house at Via Vittoria : see !  
Her so-called mother,—one arm round the waist 970  
O' the child to keep her from the toys, let fall  
At wonder I can live yet look so grim,—  
Ushers her in, with deprecating wave  
Of the other,—and she fronts me loose at last,  
Held only by the mother's finger-tip. 975  
Struck dumb, for she was white enough before !  
She eyes me with those frightened balls of black,  
As heifer—the old simile comes pat—  
Eyes tremblingly the altar and the priest.  
The amazed look, all one insuppressive prayer,— 980  
Might she but be set free as heretofore,  
Have this cup leave her lips unblistered, bear

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Any cross anywhither anyhow,  
So but alone, so but apart from me !  
You are touched ? So am I, quite otherwise, 985  
If 't is with pity. I resent my wrong,  
Being a man : I only show man's soul  
Through man's flesh : she sees mine, it strikes her thus !  
Is that attractive ? To a youth perhaps—  
Calf-creature, one-part boy to three-parts girl, 990  
To whom it is a flattering novelty  
That he, men use to motion from their path,  
Can thus impose, thus terrify in turn  
A chit whose terror shall be changed apace  
To bliss unbearable when, grace and glow, 995  
Prowess and pride descend the throne and touch  
Esther in all that pretty tremble, cured  
By the dove o' the sceptre ! But myself am old,  
O' the wane at least, in all things : what do you say  
To her who frankly thus confirms my doubt ? 1000  
I am past the prime, I scare the woman-world,  
Done-with that way : you like this piece of news ?  
A little saucy rose-bud minx can strike  
Death-damp into the breast of doughty king 1004  
Though 't were French Louis,—soul I understand,—  
Saying, by gesture of repugnance, just

“ Sire, you are regal, puissant and so forth,  
“ But—young you have been, are not, nor will be ! ”  
In vain the mother nods, winks, bustles up  
“ Count, girls incline to mature worth like you !      1010  
“ As for Pompilia, what ’s flesh, fish or fowl  
“ To one who apprehends no difference,  
“ And would accept you even were you old  
“ As you are . . . youngish by her father’s side ?  
“ Trim but your beard a little, thin your bush      1015  
“ Of eyebrow ; and for presence, portliness  
“ And decent gravity, you beat a boy ! ”  
Deceive you for a second, if you may,  
In presence of the child that so loves age,  
Whose neck writhes, cords itself against your kiss,      1020  
Whose hand you wring stark, rigid with despair !  
Well, I resent this ; I am young in soul,  
Nor old in body,—thaws and sinews here,—  
Though the vile surface be not smooth as once,—  
Far beyond that first wheelwork which went wrong      1025  
Through the untempered iron ere ’t was proof :  
I am the steel man worth ten times the crude,—  
Would woman see what this declines to see,  
Declines to say “ I see,”—the officious word  
That makes the thing, pricks on the soul to shoot      1030

New fire into the half-used cinder, flesh !  
Therefore 't is she begins with wronging me,  
Who cannot but begin with hating her.  
Our marriage follows : there she stands again !  
Why do I laugh ? Why, in the very gripe 1035  
O' the jaws of death's gigantic skull, do I  
Grin back his grin, make sport of my own pangs ?  
Why from each clashing of his molars, ground  
To make the devil bread from out my grist,  
Leaps out a spark of mirth, a hellish toy ? 1040  
Take notice we are lovers in a church,  
Waiting the sacrament to make us one  
And happy ! Just as bid, she bears herself,  
Comes and kneels, rises, speaks, is silent,—goes :  
So have I brought my horse, by word and blow, 1045  
To stand stock-still and front the fire he dreads.  
How can I other than remember this,  
Resent the very obedience ? Gain thereby ?  
Yes, I do gain my end and have my will,—  
Thanks to whom ? When the mother speaks the word,  
She obeys it—even to enduring me ! 1051  
There had been compensation in revolt—  
Revolt 's to quell : but martyrdom rehearsed,  
But predetermined saintship for the sake

O' the mother?—"Go!" thought I, "we meet again!"  
Pass the next weeks of dumb contented death, 1056  
She lives,—wakes up, installed in house and home,  
Is mine, mine all day-long, all night-long mine.  
Good folks begin at me with open mouth  
"Now, at least, reconcile the child to life! 1060  
"Study and make her love . . . that is, endure  
"The . . . hem! the . . . all of you though somewhat  
old,  
"Till it amount to something, in her eye,  
"As good as love, better a thousand times,—  
"Since nature helps the woman in such strait, 1065  
"Makes passiveness her pleasure : failing which,  
"What if you give up boy and girl fools'-play  
"And go on to wise friendship all at once?  
"Those boys and girls kiss themselves cold, you know,  
"Toy themselves tired and slink aside full soon 1070  
"To friendship, as they name satiety :  
"Thither go you and wait their coming!" Thanks,  
Considerate advisers,—but, fair play!  
Had you and I but started fair at first,  
We, keeping fair, might reach it, neck by neck, 1075  
This blessed goal, whenever fate so please :  
But why am I to miss the daisied mile

The course begins with, why obtain the dust  
Of the end precisely at the starting-point ?  
Why quaff life's cup blown free of all the beads, 1080  
The bright red froth wherein our beard should steep  
Before our mouth essay the black o' the wine ?  
Foolish, the love-fit ? Let me prove it such  
Like you, before like you I puff things clear !  
" The best 's to come, no rapture but content ! 1085  
" Not the first glory but a sober glow,  
" Nor a spontaneous outburst in pure boon,  
" So much as gained by patience, care and toil,  
" Proper appreciation and esteem !"  
Go preach that to your nephews, not to me 1090  
Who, tired i' the midway of my life, would stop  
And take my first refreshment in a rose :  
What 's this coarse woolly hip, worn smooth of leat,  
You counsel I go plant in garden-pot,  
Water with tears, manure with sweat and blood, 1095  
In confidence the seed shall germinate  
And, for its very best, some far-off day,  
Grow big, and blow me out a dog-rose bell ?  
Why must your nephews begin breathing spice  
O' the hundred-petalled Provence prodigy ? 1100  
Nay, more and worse,—would such my root bear rose—

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Prove really flower and favourite, not the kind  
That 's queen, but those three leaves that make one cup  
And hold the hedge-bird's breakfast,—then indeed  
The prize though poor would pay the care and toil ! 1105  
Respect we Nature that makes least as most,  
Marvellous in the minim ! But this bud,  
Bit through and burned black by the tempter's tooth,  
This bloom whose best grace was the slug outside  
And the wasp inside its bosom,—call you “ rose ? ” 1110  
Claim no immunity from a weed's fate  
For the horrible present ! What you call my wife  
I call a nullity in female shape,  
Vapid disgust, soon to be pungent plague,  
When mixed with, made confusion and a curse 1115  
By two abominable nondescripts,  
That father and that mother : think you see  
The dreadful bronze our boast, we Aretines,  
The Etruscan monster, the three-headed thing,  
Bellerophon's foe ! How name you the whole beast ?  
You choose to name the body from one head, 1121  
That of the simple kid which droops the eye,  
Hangs the neck and dies tenderly enough :  
I rather see the griesly lion belch  
Flame out i' the midst, the serpent writhe her rings, 1125

Grafted into the common stock for tail,  
And name the brute, Chimæra, which I slew !  
How was there ever more to be—(concede  
My wife's insipid harmless nullity)—  
Dissociation from that pair of plagues— 1130  
That mother with her cunning and her cant—  
The eyes with first their twinkle of conceit,  
Then, dropped to earth in mock-demureness,—now,  
The smile self-satisfied from ear to ear,  
Now, the prim pursed-up mouth's protruded lips, 1135  
With deferential duck, slow swing of head,  
Tempting the sudden fist of man too much,—  
That owl-like screw of lid and rock of ruff !  
As for the father,—Cardinal, you know,  
The kind of idiot !—such are rife in Rome, 1140  
But they wear velvet commonly ; good fools,  
At the end of life, to furnish forth young folk  
Who grin and bear with imbecility :  
Since the stalled ass, the joker, sheds from jaw  
Corn, in the joke, for those who laugh or starve. 1145  
But what say we to the same solemn beast  
Wagging his ears and wishful of our pat,  
When turned, with holes in hide and bones laid bare, .  
To forage for himself i' the waste o' the world,

Sir Dignity i' the dumps? Pat him? We drub 1150  
Self-knowledge, rather, into frowzy pate,  
Teach Piety to get trappings or go hang!  
Fancy this quondam oracle in vogue  
At Via Vittoria, this personified  
Authority when time was,—Pantaloone 1155  
Flaunting his tom-fool tawdry just the same  
As if Ash-Wednesday were mid-Carnival!  
That's the extreme and unforgiveable  
Of sins, as I account such. Have you stooped  
For your own ends to bestialize yourself 1160  
By flattery of a fellow of this stamp?  
The ends obtained, or else shown out of reach,  
He goes on, takes the flattery for pure truth,—  
“ You love, and honour me, of course : what next ? ”  
What, but the trifle of the stabbing, friend ?— 1165  
Which taught you how one worships when the shrine  
Has lost the relic that we bent before.  
Angry ! And how could I be otherwise ?  
'T is plain : this pair of old pretentious fools  
Meant to fool me : it happens, I fooled them. 1170  
Why could not these who sought to buy and sell  
Me,—when they found themselves were bought and sold,  
Make up their mind to the proved rule of right,

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Be chattel and not chapman any more ?  
Miscalculation has its consequence ; 1175  
But when the shepherd crooks a sheep-like thing  
And meaning to get wool, dislodges fleece  
And finds the veritable wolf beneath,  
(How that staunch image serves at every turn !)  
Does he, by way of being politic, 1180  
Pluck the first whisker grimly visible ?  
Or rather grow in a trice all gratitude,  
Protest this sort-of-what-one-might-name sheep  
Beats the old other curly-coated kind,  
And shall share board and bed, if so it deign, 1185  
With its discoverer, like a royal ram ?  
Ay, thus, with chattering teeth and knocking knees,  
Would wisdom treat the adventure ! these, forsooth,  
Tried whisker-plucking, and so found what trap  
The whisker kept perdue, two rows of teeth— 1190  
Sharp, as too late the prying fingers felt.  
What would you have ? The fools transgress, the fools  
Forthwith receive appropriate punishment :  
They first insult me, I return the blow,  
There follows noise enough : four hubbub months, 1195  
Now hue and cry, now whimpering and wail—  
A perfect goose-yard cackle of complaint

Because I do not gild the geese their oats,—  
I have enough of noise, ope wicket wide,  
Sweep out the couple to go whine elsewhere, 1200  
Frightened a little, hurt in no respect,  
And am just taking thought to breathe again,  
Taste the sweet sudden silence all about,  
When, there they raise it, the old noise I know,  
At Rome i' the distance ! “What, begun once more ?  
“ Whine on, wail ever, 't is the loser's right !” 1206  
But eh, what sort of voice grows on the wind ?  
Triumph it sounds and no complaint at all !  
And triumph it is. My boast was premature :  
The creatures, I turned forth, clapped wing and crew  
Fighting-cock-fashion,—they had filched a pearl 1211  
From dung-heap, and might boast with cause enough !  
I was defrauded of all bargained for :  
You know, the Pope knows, not a soul but knows  
My dowry was derision, my gain—muck, 1215  
My wife, (the Church declared my flesh and blood)  
The nameless bastard of a common whore :  
My old name turned henceforth to . . shall I say  
“ He that received the ordure in his face ? ”  
And they who planned this wrong, performed this wrong,  
And then revealed this wrong to the wide world, 1221

Rounded myself in the ears with my own wrong,—

Why, these were (note hell's lucky malice, now !)

These were just they who, they alone, could act

And publish and proclaim their infamy, 1225

Secure that men would in a breath believe

Compassionate and pardon them,—for why ?

They plainly were too stupid to invent,

Too simple to distinguish wrong from right,—

Inconscious agents they, the silly-sooth, 1230

Of heaven's retributive justice on the strong

Proud cunning violent oppressor—me !

Follow them to their fate and help your best,

You Rome, Arezzo, foes called friends of mine,

They gave the good long laugh to, at my cost ! 1235

Defray your share o' the cost, since you partook

The entertainment ! Do !—assured the while,

That not one stab, I dealt to right and left,

But went the deeper for a fancy—this—

That each might do me two-fold service, find 1240

A friend's face at the bottom of each wound,

And scratch its smirk a little !

Panciatichi !

There 's a report at Florence,—is it true?—

That when your relative the Cardinal 1245

Built, only the other day, that barrack-bulk,  
The palace in Via Larga, someone picked  
From out the street a saucy quip enough  
That fell there from its day's flight through the town,  
About the flat front and the windows wide 1250  
And bulgeing heap of cornice,—hitched the joke  
Into a sonnet, signed his name thereto,  
And forthwith pinned on post the pleasantry :  
For which he 's at the galleys, rowing now  
Up to his waist in water,—just because 1255  
*Panciatric* and *lymphatic* rhymed so pat !  
I hope, Sir, those who passed this joke on me  
Were not unduly punished ? What say you,  
Prince of the Church, my patron ? Nay, indeed,  
I shall not dare insult your wits so much 1260  
As think this problem difficult to solve !  
This Pietro and Violante then, I say,  
These two ambiguous insects, changing name  
And nature with the season's warmth or chill,—  
Now, grovelled, grubbing toiling moiling ants, 1265  
A very synonym of thrift and peace,—  
Anon, with lusty June to prick their heart,  
Soared i' the air, winged flies for more offence,  
Circled me, buzzed me deaf and stung me blind,

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And stunk me dead with feter in the face 1270

Until I stopped the nuisance : there 's my crime !

Pity I did not suffer them subside

Into some further shape and final form

Of execrable life? My masters, no !

I, by one blow, wisely cut short at once 1275

Them and their transformations of disgust,

In the snug little Villa out of hand.

“ Grant me confession, give bare time for that ! ”—

Shouted the sinner till his mouth was stopped.

His life confessed !—that was enough for me, 1280

Who came to see that he did penance. 'S death !

Here 's a coil raised, a pother and for what ?

Because strength, being provoked by weakness, fought

And conquered,—the world never heard the like !

Pah, how I spend my breath on them, as if 1285

'T was their fate troubled me, too hard to range

Among the right and fit and proper things !

Ay, but Pompilia,—I await your word,—

She, unimpeached of crime, unimplicate

In folly, one of alien blood to these 1290

I punish, why extend my claim, exact

Her portion of the penalty? Yes, friends,

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I go too fast : the orator 's at fault :  
Yes, ere I lay her, with your leave, by them  
As she was laid at San Lorenzo late, 1295  
I ought to step back, lead you by degrees,  
Recounting at each step some fresh offence,  
Up to the red bed,—never fear, I will !  
Gaze at her, where I place her, to begin,  
Confound me with her gentleness and worth ! 1300  
The horrible pair have fled and left her now,  
She has her husband for her sole concern :  
His wife, the woman fashioned for his help,  
Flesh of his flesh, bone of his bone, the bride  
To groom as is the Church and Spouse, to Christ : 1305  
There she stands in his presence : “ Thy desire  
“ Shall be to the husband, o’er thee shall he rule ! ”  
—“ Pompilia, who declare that you love God,  
“ You know who said that : then, desire my love,  
“ Yield me contentment and be ruled aright ! ” 1310  
She sits up, she lies down, she comes and goes,  
Kneels at the couch-side, overleans the sill  
O’ the window, cold and pale and mute as stone,  
Strong as stone also. “ Well, are they not fled ?  
“ Am I not left, am I not one for all ? 1315  
“ Speak a word, drop a tear, detach a glance,

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“ Bless me or curse me of your own accord !  
“ Is it the ceiling only wants your soul,  
“ Is worth your eyes ? ” And then the eyes descend,  
And do look at me. Is it at the meal ? 1320  
“ Speak ! ” she obeys, “ Be silent ! ” she obeys,  
Counting the minutes till I cry “ Depart,”  
As brood-bird when you saunter past her eggs.  
Departed, just the same through door and wall  
I see the same stone strength of white despair. 1325  
And all this will be never otherwise !  
Before, the parents’ presence lent her life :  
She could play off her sex’s armoury,  
Intreat, reproach, be female to my male,  
Try all the shrieking doubles of the hare, 1330  
Go clamour to the Commissary, bid  
The Archbishop hold my hands and stop my tongue,  
And yield fair sport so : but the tactics change,  
The hare stands stock-still to enrage the hound !  
Since that day when she learned she was no child 1335  
Of those she thought her parents,—that their trick  
Had tricked me whom she thought sole trickster late,—  
Why, I suppose she said within herself  
“ Then, no more struggle for my parents’ sake !  
“ And, for my own sake, why needs struggle be ? ” 1340

But is there no third party to the pact?  
What of her husband's relish or dislike  
For this new game of giving up the game,  
This worst offence of not offending more?  
I 'll not believe but instinct wrought in this, 1345  
Set her on to conceive and execute  
The preferable plague: how sure they probe,—  
These jades, the sensitivest soft of man!  
The long black hair was wound now in a wisp,  
Crowned sorrow better than the wild web late: 1350  
No more soiled dress, 'tis trimness triumphs now,  
For how should malice go with negligence?  
The frayed silk looked the fresher for her spite!  
There was an end to springing out of bed,  
Praying me, with face buried on my feet, 1355  
Be hindered of my pastime,—so an end  
To my rejoinder, "What, on the ground at last?  
"Vanquished in fight, a suppliant for life?  
"What if I raise you? 'Ware the casting down  
"When next you fight me!" Then, she lay there, mine:  
Now, mine she is if I please wring her neck,— 1361  
A moment of disquiet, working eyes,  
Protruding tongue, a long sigh, then no more,—  
As if one killed the horse one could not ride!

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Had I enjoined "Cut off the hair!"—why, snap 1365  
The scissors, and at once a yard or so  
Had fluttered in black serpents to the floor :  
But till I did enjoin it, how she combs,  
Uncurls and draws out to the complete length,  
Plaits, places the insulting rope on head 1370  
To be an eyesore past dishevelment !  
Is all done? Then sit still again and stare !  
I advise—no one think to bear that look  
Of steady wrong, endured as steadily,  
—Through what sustainment of deluding hope? 1375  
Who is the friend i' the background that notes all ?  
Who may come presently and close accounts ?  
This self possession to the uttermost,  
How does it differ in aught, save degree,  
From the terrible patience of God ? 1380  
" All which just means,  
" She did not love you ! " Again the word is launched  
And the fact fronts me ! What, you try the wards  
With the true key and the dead lock flies ope ?  
No, it sticks fast and leaves you fumbling still ! 1385  
You have some fifty servants, Cardinal,—  
Which of them loves you ? Which subordinate  
But makes parade of such officiousness

That,—if there 's no love prompts it,—love, the sham,  
Does twice the service done by love, the true. 1390  
God bless us liars, where 's one touch of truth  
In what we tell the world, or world tells us,  
Of how we love each other? All the same,  
We calculate on word and deed, nor err,—  
Bid such a man do such a loving act, 1395  
Sure of effect and negligent of cause,  
Just as we bid a horse, with cluck of tongue,  
Stretch his legs arch-wise, crouch his saddled back  
To foot-reach of the stirrup—all for love,  
And some for memory of the smart of switch 1400  
On the inside of the foreleg—what care we?  
Yet where 's the bond obliges horse to man  
Like that which binds fast wife to husband? God  
Laid down the law: gave man the brawny arm  
And ball of fist—woman the beardless cheek 1405  
And proper place to suffer in the side :  
Since it is he can strike, let her obey !  
Can she feel no love? Let her show the more,  
Sham the worse, damn herself praiseworthy !  
Who 's that soprano, Rome went mad about 1410  
Last week while I lay rotting in my straw ?  
The very jailor gossiped in his praise—

How,—dressed up like Armida, though a man ;  
And painted to look pretty, though a fright,—  
He still made love so that the ladies swooned, 1415  
Being an eunuch. “ Ah, Rinaldo mine !  
“ But to breathe by thee while Jove slays us both ! ”  
All the poor bloodless creature never felt,  
*Si, do, re, mi, fa*, squeak and squall—for what ?  
Two gold zecchines the evening. Here ’s my slave,  
Whose body and soul depend upon my nod, 1421  
Can ’t falter out the first note in the scale  
For her life ! Why blame me if I take the life ?  
All women cannot give men love, forsooth !  
No, nor all pullets lay the henwife eggs— 1425  
Whereat she bids them remedy the fault,  
Brood on a chalk-ball : soon the nest is stocked—  
Otherwise, to the plucking and the spit !  
This wife of mine was of another mood—  
Would not begin the lie that ends with truth, 1430  
Nor feign the love that brings real love about :  
Wherefore I judged, sentenced and punished her.  
But why particularize, defend the deed ?  
Say that I hated her for no one cause  
Beyond my pleasure so to do,—what then ? 1435  
Just on as much incitement acts the world,

All of you ! Look and like ! You favour one,  
Brow-beat another, leave alone a third,—  
Why should you master natural caprice ?  
Pure nature ! Try : plant elm by ash in file ;      1440  
Both unexceptionable trees-enough,  
They ought to overlean each other, pair  
At top, and arch across the avenue  
The whole path to the pleasaunce : do they so—  
Or loathe, lie off abhorrent each from each ?      1445  
Lay the fault elsewhere : since we must have faults,  
Mine shall have been,—seeing there 's ill in the end  
Come of my course,—that I fare somehow worse  
For the way I took,—my fault . . . as God 's my judge,  
I see not where my fault lies, that 's the truth !      1450  
I ought . . oh, ought in my own interest  
Have let the whole adventure go untried,  
This chance by marriage,—or else, trying it,  
Ought to have turned it to account, some one  
O' the hundred otherwises ? Ay, my friend,      1455  
Easy to say, easy to do : step right  
Now you 've stepped left and stumbled on the thing,  
—The red thing ! Doubt I any more than you  
That practice makes man perfect ? Give again  
The chance,—same marriage and no other wife,      1460

Be sure I 'll edify you ! That 's because  
I 'm practised, grown fit guide for Guido's self.  
You proffered guidance,—I know, none so well,—  
You laid down law and rolled decorum out,  
From pulpit-corner on the gospel-side,— 1465  
Wanted to make your great experience mine,  
Save me the personal search and pains so : thanks !  
Take your word on life's use ? When I take his—  
The muzzled ox that treadeth out the corn,  
Gone blind in padding round and round one path,—  
As to the taste of green grass in the field ! 1471  
What do you know o' the world that 's trodden flat  
And salted sterile with your daily dung,  
Leavened into a lump of loathsomeness ?  
Take your opinion of the modes of life, 1475  
The aims of life, life's triumph or defeat,  
How to feel, how to scheme and how to do  
Or else leave undone ? You preached long and loud  
On high-days, " Take our doctrine upon trust !  
" Into the mill-house with you ! Grind our corn, 1480  
" Relish our chaff, and let the green grass grow ! "  
I tried chaff, found I famished on such fare,  
So made this mad rush at the mill-house-door,  
Buried my head up to the ears in dew,

Browzed on the best : for which you brain me, Sirs ! 1485  
Be it so. I conceived of life that way,  
And still declare—life, without absolute use  
Of the actual sweet therein, is death, not life.  
Give me,—pay down,—not promise, which is air,—  
Something that 's out of life and better still, 1490  
Make sure reward, make certain punishment,  
Entice me, scare me,—I 'll forego this life ;  
Otherwise, no !—the less that words, mere wind,  
Would cheat me of some minutes while they plague.  
The fulness of revenge here,—blame yourselves 1495  
For this eruption of the pent-up soul  
You prisoned first and played with afterward !  
“ Deny myself ” meant simply pleasure you,  
The sacred and superior, save the mark !  
You,—whose stupidity and insolence 1500  
I must defer to, soothe at every turn,—  
Whose swine-like snuffling greed and grunting lust  
I had to wink at or help gratify,—  
While the same passions,—dared they perk in me,  
Me, the immeasurably marked, by God, 1505  
Master of the whole world of such as you,—  
I, boast such passions ? 'T was “ Suppress them straight !  
“ Or stay, we 'll pick and choose before destroy.

“ Here ’s wrath in you, a serviceable sword,—  
“ Beat it into a ploughshare ! What ’s this long 1510  
“ Lance-like ambition ? Forge a pruning-hook,  
“ May be of service when our vines grow tall !  
“ But—sword used swordwise, spear thrust out as spear ?  
“ Anathema ! Suppression is the word ! ”  
My nature, when the outrage was too gross, 1515  
Widened itself an outlet over-wide  
By way of answer, sought its own relief  
With more of fire and brimstone than you wished.  
All your own doing : preachers, blame yourselves !

’Tis I preach while the hour-glass runs and runs ! 1520  
God keep me patient ! All I say just means—  
My wife proved, whether by her fault or mine,—  
That ’s immaterial,—a true stumbling-block  
I’ the way of me her husband. I but plied  
The hatchet yourselves use to clear a path, 1525  
Was politic, played the game you warrant wins,  
Plucked at law’s robe a-rustle through the courts,  
Bowed down to kiss divinity’s buckled shoe  
Cushioned i’ the church : efforts all wide the aim !  
Procedures to no purpose ! Then flashed truth ! 1530  
The letter kills, the spirit keeps alive

In law and gospel : there be nods and winks

Instruct a wise man to assist himself

In certain matters, nor seek aid at all.

“ Ask money of me,”—quoth the clownish saw,— 1535

“ And take my purse ! But,—speaking with respect,—

“ Need you a solace for the troubled nose ?

“ Let everybody wipe his own himself !”

Sirs, tell me free and fair ! Had things gone well

At the wayside inn : had I surprised asleep 1540

The runaways, as was so probable,

And pinned them each to other partridge-wise,

Through back and breast to breast and back, then bade

Bystanders witness if the spit, my sword,

Were loaded with unlawful game for once— 1545

Would you have interposed to damp the glow

Applauding me on every husband's cheek ?

Would you have checked the cry “ A judgment, see !

“ A warning, note ! Be henceforth chaste, ye wives,

“ Nor stray beyond your proper precinct, priests !” 1550

If you had, then your house against itself

Divides, nor stands your kingdom any more.

Oh, why, why was it not ordained just so ?

Why fell not things out so nor otherwise ?

Ask that particular devil whose task it is 1555



To trip the all-but-at perfection,—slur  
The line o' the painter just where paint leaves off  
And life begins,—puts ice into the ode  
O' the poet while he cries "Next stanza—fire!"  
Inscribes all human effort with one word, 1560  
Artistry's haunting curse, the Incomplete!  
Being incomplete, the act escaped success.  
Easy to blame now! Every fool can swear  
To hole in net that held and slipped the fish.  
But, treat my act with fair unjaundiced eye, 1565  
What was there wanting to a masterpiece  
Except the luck that lies beyond a man?  
My way with the woman, now proved grossly wrong,  
Just missed of being gravely grandly right  
And making critics laugh on the other side. 1570  
Do, for the poor obstructed artist's sake,  
Go with him over that spoiled work once more!  
Take only its first flower, the ended act  
Now in the dusty pod, dry and defunct!  
I march to the Villa, and my men with me, 1575  
That evening, and we reach the door and stand.  
I say . . no, it shoots through me lightning-like  
While I pause, breathe, my hand upon the latch,  
"Let me forebode! Thus far, too much success:

- “ I want the natural failure—find it where? 1580  
“ Which thread will have to break and leave a loop  
“ I’ the meshy combination, my brain’s loom  
“ Wove this long while, and now next minute tests?  
“ Of three that are to catch, two should go free,  
“ One must : all three surprised,—impossible! 1585  
“ Beside, I seek three and may chance on six,—  
“ This neighbour, t’ other gossip,—the babe’s birth  
“ Brings such to fireside, and folks give them wine,—  
“ ’T is late : but when I break in presently  
“ One will be found outlingering the rest 1590  
“ For promise of a posset,—one whose shout  
“ Would raise the dead down in the catacombs,  
“ Much more the city-watch that goes its round.  
“ When did I ever turn adroitly up  
“ To sun some brick embedded in the soil, 1595  
“ And with one blow crush all three scorpions there?  
“ Or Pietro or Violante shambles off—  
“ It cannot be but I surprise my wife—  
“ If only she is stopped and stamped on, good !  
“ That shall suffice : more is improbable. 1600  
“ Now I may knock !” And this once for my sake  
The impossible was effected : I called king,  
Queen and knave in a sequence, and cards came,

All three, three only ! So, I had my way,  
Did my deed : so, unbrokenly lay bare 1605  
Each tænia that had sucked me dry of juice,  
At last outside me, not an inch of ring  
Left now to writhe about and root itself  
I' the heart all powerless for revenge ! Henceforth  
I might thrive : these were drawn and dead and damned.  
Oh Cardinal, the deep long sigh you heave 1611  
When the load 's off you, ringing as it runs  
All the way down the serpent-stair to hell !  
No doubt the fine delirium flustered me,  
Turned my brain with the influx of success 1615  
As if the sole need now were to wave wand  
And find doors fly wide,—wish and have my will,—  
The rest o' the scheme would care for itself : escape ?  
Easy enough were that, and poor beside !  
It all but proved so,—ought to quite have proved, 1620  
Since, half the chances had sufficed, set free  
Anyone, with his senses at command,  
From thrice the danger of my flight. But, drunk,  
Redundantly triumphant,—some reverse  
Was sure to follow ! There 's no other way 1625  
Accounts for such prompt perfect failure then  
And there on the instant. Any day o' the week,

A ducat slid discreetly into palm  
O' the mute post-master, while you whisper him—  
How you the Count and certain four your knaves, 1630  
Have just been mauling who was malapert,  
Suspect the kindred may prove troublesome,  
Therefore, want horses in a hurry,—that  
And nothing more secures you any day  
The pick o' the stable ! Yet I try the trick, 1635  
Double the bribe, call myself Duke for Count,  
And say the dead man only was a Jew,  
And for my pains find I am dealing just  
With the one scrupulous fellow in all Rome—  
Just this immaculate official stares, 1640  
Sees I want hat on head and sword in sheath,  
Am splashed with other sort of wet than wine,  
Shrugs shoulder, puts my hand by, gold and all,  
Stands on the strictness of the rule o' the road !  
“ Where 's the Permission ? ” Where 's the wretched rag  
With the due seal and sign of Rome's Police, 1646  
To be had for asking, half-an-hour ago ?  
Gone ? Get another, or no horses hence ! ”  
He dares not stop me, we five glare too grim,  
But hinders,—hacks and hamstrings sure enough, 1650  
Gives me some twenty miles of miry road

More to march in the middle of that night  
Whereof the rough beginning taxed the strength  
O' the youngsters, much more mine, such as you see,  
Who had to think as well as act : dead-beat, 1655  
We gave in ere we reached the boundary  
And safe spot out of this irrational Rome,—  
Where, on dismounting from our steeds next day,  
We had snapped our fingers at you, safe and sound,  
Tuscans once more in blessed Tuscany, 1660  
Where the laws make allowance, understand  
Civilized life and do its champions right !  
Witness the sentence of the Rota there,  
Arezzo uttered, the Granduke confirmed,  
One week before I acted on its hint,— 1665  
Giving friend Guillichini, for his love,  
The galleys, and my wife your saint, Rome's saint,—  
Rome manufactures saints enough to know,—  
Seclusion at the Stinche for her life.  
All this, that all but was, might all have been, 1670  
Yet was not ! baulked by just a scrupulous knave  
Whose palm was horn through handling horses' hoofs  
And could not close upon my proffered gold !  
What say you to the spite of fortune ? Well,  
The worst 's in store : thus hindered, haled this way 1675

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To Rome again by handogs, whom find I  
Here, still to fight with, but my pale frail wife ?  
—Riddled with wounds by one not like to waste  
The blows he dealt,—knowing anatomy,—  
(I think I told you) one to pick and choose 1680  
The vital parts ! 'T was learning all in vain !  
She too must shimmer through the gloom o' the grave,  
Come and confront me—not at judgment-seat  
Where I could twist her soul, as erst her flesh,  
And turn her truth into a lie,—but there, 1685  
O' the death-bed, with God's hand between us both,  
Striking me dumb, and helping her to speak,  
Tell her own story her own way, and turn  
My plausibility to nothingness !  
Four whole days did Pompilia keep alive, 1690  
With the best surgery of Rome agape  
At the miracle,—this cut, the other slash,  
And yet the life refusing to dislodge,  
Four whole extravagant impossible days,  
Till she had time to finish and persuade 1695  
Every man, every woman, every child  
In Rome, of what she would : the selfsame she.  
Who, but a year ago, had wrung her hands,  
Reddened her eyes and beat her breasts, rehearsed

The whole game at Arezzo, nor availed 1700  
Thereby to move one heart or raise one hand !  
When destiny intends you cards like these,  
What good of skill and pre-concerted play ?  
Had she been found dead, as I left her dead,  
I should have told a tale brooked no reply : 1705  
You scarcely will suppose me found at fault  
With that advantage ! “ What brings me to Rome ?  
“ Necessity to claim and take my wife :  
“ Better, to claim and take my new-born babe,—  
“ Strong in paternity a fortnight old, 1710  
“ When ’t is at strongest : warily I work,  
“ Knowing the machinations of my foe ;  
“ I have companionship and use the night :  
“ I seek my wife and child,—I find—no child  
“ But wife, in the embraces of that priest 1715  
“ Who caused her to elope from me. These two,  
“ Backed by the pander-pair who watch the while,  
“ Spring on me like so many tiger-cats,  
“ Glad of the chance to end the intruder. I—  
“ What should I do but stand on my defence, 1720  
“ Strike right, strike left, strike thick and threefold, slay,  
“ Not all—because the coward priest escapes.  
“ Last, I escape, in fear of evil tongues,

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“ And having had my taste of Roman law.”

What 's disputable, refutable here?— 1725

Save by just this one ghost-thing half on earth,

Half out of it,—as if she held God's hand

While she leant back and looked her last at me,

Forgiving me (here monks begin to weep)

Oh, from her very soul, commending mine 1730

To heavenly mercies which are infinite,—

While fixing fast my head beneath your knife !

'T is fate not fortune ! All is of a piece !

When was it chance informed me of my youths ?

My rustic four o' the family, soft swains, 1735

What sweet surprise had they in store for me,

Those of my very household,—what did Law

Twist with her rack-and-cord-contrivance late

From out their bones and marrow ? What but this—

Had no one of these several stumbling-blocks 1740

Stopped me, they yet were cherishing a scheme,

All of their honest country homespun wit,

To quietly next day at crow of cock,

Cut my own throat too, for their own behoof,

Seeing I had forgot to clear accounts 1745

O' the instant, nowise slackened speed for that,—

And somehow never might find memory,



Once safe back in Arezzo, where things change,  
And a court-lord needs mind no country lout.  
Well, being the arch-offender, I die last,— 1750  
May, ere my head falls, have my eyesight free,  
Nor miss them dangling high on either hand,  
Like scarecrows in a hemp-field, for their pains !

And then my Trial,—’t is my Trial that bites  
Like a corrosive, so the cards are packed, 1755  
Dice loaded, and my life-stake tricked away !  
Look at my lawyers, lacked they grace of law,  
Latin or logic ? Were not they fools to the height,  
Fools to the depth, fools to the level between,  
O’ the foolishness set to decide the case ? 1760  
They feign, they flatter ; nowise does it skill,  
Everything goes against me : deal each judge  
His dole of flattery and feigning,—why,  
He turns and tries and snuffs and savours it,  
As some old fly the sugar-grain, your gift ; 1765  
Then eyes your thumb and finger, brushes clean  
The absurd old head of him, and whisks away,  
Leaving your thumb and finger dirty. Faugh !

And finally, after this long-drawn range

Of affront, failure, failure and affront,— 1770  
This path, 'twixt crosses leading to a skull,  
Paced by me barefoot, bloodied by my palms  
From the entry to the end,—there 's light at length,  
A cranny of escape : appeal may be  
To the old man, to the father, to the Pope, 1775  
For a little life—from one whose life is spent,  
A little pity—from pity's source and seat,  
A little indulgence to rank, privilege,  
From one who is the thing personified,  
Rank, privilege, indulgence, grown beyond 1780  
Earth's bearing, even, ask Jansenius else !  
Still the same answer, still no other tune  
From the cicala perched at the tree-top  
Than crickets noisy round the root,—'t is " Die !"  
Bids Law—" Be damned !" adds Gospel,—nay, 1785  
No word so frank,—'t is rather, " Save yourself !"  
The Pope subjoins—" Confess and be absolved !  
" So shall my credit countervail your shame,  
" And the world see I have not lost the knack  
" Of trying all the spirits : yours, my son, 1790  
" Wants but a fiery washing to emerge  
" In clarity ! Come, cleanse you, else the ache  
" Of these old bones, refresh our bowels, boy !"

Do I mistake your mission from the Pope?  
Then, bear his Holiness the mind of me ! 1795  
I do get strength from being thrust to wall,  
Successively wrenched from pillar and from post  
By this tenacious hate of fortune, hate  
Of all things in, under, and above earth.  
Warfare, begun this mean unmanly mode, 1800  
Does best to end so,—gives earth spectacle  
Of a brave fighter who succumbs to odds  
That turn defeat to victory. Stab, I fold  
My mantle round me ! Rome approves my act :  
Applauds the blow which costs me life but keeps 1805  
My honour spotless : Rome would praise no more  
Had I fallen, say, some fifteen years ago,  
Helping Vienna when our Aretines  
Flocked to Duke Charles and fought Turk Mustafa ;  
Nor would you two be trembling o'er my corpse 1810  
With all this exquisite solicitude.  
Why is it that I make such suit to live ?  
The popular sympathy that 's round me now  
Would break like bubble that o'er-domes a fly—  
Pretty enough while he lies quiet there, 1815  
But let him want the air and ply the wing,  
Why, it breaks and bespatters him, what else ?

Cardinal, if the Pope had pardoned me,  
And I walked out of prison through the crowd,  
It would not be your arm I should dare press ! 1820  
Then, if I got safe to my place again,  
How sad and sapless were the years to come !  
I go my old ways and find things grown grey ;  
You priests leer at me, old friends look askance ;  
The mob 's in love, I 'll wager, to a man, 1825  
With my poor young good beauteous murdered wife :  
For hearts require instruction how to beat,  
And eyes, on warrant of the story, wax  
Wanton at portraiture in white and black  
Of dead Pompilia gracing ballad-sheet, 1830  
Which eyes, lived she unmurdered and unsung,  
Would never turn though she paced street as bare  
As the mad penitent ladies do in France.  
My brothers quietly would edge me out  
Of use and management of things called mine ; 1835  
Do I command ? " You stretched command before !"  
Show anger ? " Anger little helped you once !"  
Advise ? " How managed you affairs of old ?"  
My very mother, all the while they gird,  
Turns eye up, gives confirmatory groan ; 1840  
For unsucccess, explain it how you will,

Disqualifies you, makes you doubt yourself,  
—Much more, is found decisive by your friends.  
Beside, am I not fifty years of age?  
What new leap would a life take, checked like mine 1845  
I' the spring at outset? Where's my second chance?  
Ay, but the babe . . . I had forgot my son,  
My heir! Now for a burst of gratitude!  
There's some appropriate service to intone,  
Some *gaudeamus* and thanksgiving-psalm! 1850  
Old, I renew my youth in him, and poor  
Possess a treasure,—is not that the phrase?  
Only I must wait patient twenty years—  
Nourishing all the while, as father ought,  
The excrescence with my daily blood of life. 1855  
Does it respond to hope, such sacrifice,—  
Grows the wen plump while I myself grow lean?  
Why, here's my son and heir in evidence,  
Who stronger, wiser, handsomer than I  
By fifty years, relieves me of each load,— 1860  
Tames my hot horse, carries my heavy gun,  
Courts my coy mistress,—has his apt advice  
On house-economy, expenditure,  
And what not? All which good gifts and great growth  
Because of my decline, he brings to bear 1865

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On Guido, but half apprehensive how  
He cumbers earth, crosses the brisk young Count,  
Who civilly would thrust him from the scene.  
Contrariwise, does the blood-offering fail ?  
There 's an ineptitude, one blank the more 1870  
Added to earth in semblance of my child ?  
Then, this has been a costly piece of work,  
My life exchanged for his !—why he, not I,  
Enjoy the world, if no more grace accrue ?  
Dwarf me, what giant have you made of him ? 1875  
I do not dread the disobedient son—  
I know how to suppress rebellion there,  
Being not quite the fool my father was.  
But grant the medium measure of a man,  
The usual compromise 'twixt fool and sage, 1880  
—You know—the tolerably-obstinate,  
The not-so-much-perverse but you may train,  
The true son-servant that, when parent bids  
“ Go work, son, in my vineyard !” makes reply  
“ I go, Sir !”—Why, what profit in your son 1885  
Beyond the drudges you might subsidize,  
Have the same work from, at a paul the head ?  
Look at those four young precious olive-plants  
Reared at Vittiano,—not on flesh and blood,

These twenty years, but black bread and sour wine! 1890  
I bade them put forth tender branch, and hook  
And hurt three enemies I had in Rome :  
They did my hest as unreluctantly,  
At promise of a dollar, as a son  
Adjured by mumping memories of the past ! 1895  
No, nothing repays youth expended so—  
Youth, I say, who am young still : give but leave  
To live my life out, to the last I 'd live  
And die conceding age no right of youth !  
It is the will runs the renewing nerve 1900  
Through flaccid flesh that faints before the time.  
Therefore no sort of use for son have I—  
Sick, not of life's feast but of steps to climb  
To the house where life prepares her feast,—of means  
To the end : for make the end attainable 1905  
Without the means,—my relish were like yours.  
A man may have an appetite enough  
For a whole dish of robins ready cooked,  
And yet lack courage to face sleet, pad snow,  
And snare sufficiently for supper. 1910

Thus

The time 's arrived when, ancient Roman-like,

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I am bound to fall on my own sword,—why not  
Say—Tuscan-like, more ancient, better still ?  
Will you hear truth can do no harm nor good ?      1915  
I think I never was at any time  
A Christian, as you nickname all the world,  
Me among others : truce to nonsense now !  
Name me, a primitive religionist—  
As should the aboriginary be      1920  
I boast myself, Etruscan, Aretine,  
One sprung,—your frigid Virgil's fieriest word,—  
From fauns and nymphs, trunks and the heart of oak,  
With,—for a visible divinity,—  
The portent of a Jove Ægiochus      1925  
Descried 'mid clouds, lightning and thunder, couched  
On topmost crag of your Capitoline—  
'T is in the Seventh Æneid,—what, the Eighth ?  
Right,—thanks, Abate,—though the Christian's dumb,  
The Latinist's vivacious in you yet !      1930  
I know my grandsire had our tapestry  
Marked with the motto, 'neath a certain shield,  
His grandson presently will give some gules  
To vary azure. First we fight for faiths,  
But get to shake hands at the last of all :      1935  
Mine's your faith too,—in Jove Ægiochus !

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Nor do Greek gods, that serve as supplement,  
Jar with the simpler scheme, if understood.  
We want such intermediary race  
To make communication possible ; 1940  
The real thing were too lofty, we too low,  
Midway hang these : we feel their use so plain  
In linking height to depth, that we doff hat  
And put no question nor pry narrowly  
Into the nature hid behind the names. 1945  
We grudge no rite the fancy may demand ;  
But never, more than needs, invent, refine,  
Improve upon requirement, idly wise  
Beyond the letter, teaching gods their trade,  
Which is to teach us : we 'll obey when taught. 1950  
Why should we do our duty past the due ?  
When the sky darkens, Jove is wroth,—say prayer !  
When the sun shines and Jove is glad,—sing psalm !  
But wherefore pass prescription and devise  
Blood-offering for sweat-service, lend the rod 1955  
A pungency through pickle of our own ?  
Learned Abate,—no one teaches you  
What Venus means and who 's Apollo here !  
I spare you, Cardinal,—but, though you wince,  
You know me, I know you, and both know that ! 1960

So, if Apollo bids us fast, we fast :  
But where does Venus order we stop sense  
When Master Pietro rhymes a pleasantry ?  
Give alms prescribed on Friday,—but, hold hand  
Because your foe lies prostrate,—where 's the word 1965  
Explicit in the book debars revenge ?  
The rationale of your scheme is just  
“ Pay toll here, there pursue your pleasure free ! ”  
So do you turn to use the medium-powers,  
Mars and Minerva, Bacchus and the rest, 1970  
And so are saved propitiating—whom ?  
What all-good, all-wise and all-potent Jove  
Vexed by the very sins in man, himself  
Made life's necessity when man he made ?  
Irrational bunglers ! So, the living truth 1975  
Revealed to strike Pan dead, ducks low at last,  
Prays leave to hold its own and live good days  
Provided it go masque grotesquely, called  
Christian not Pagan. Oh, you purged the sky  
Of all gods save the One, the great and good, 1980  
Clapped hands and triumphed ! But the change came  
fast :  
The inexorable need in man for life—  
(Life, you may mulct and minish to a grain

Out of the lump, so the grain left but live)  
 Laughed at your substituting death for life, 1985  
 And bade you do your worst : which worst was done  
 In just that age styled primitive and pure  
 When Saint this, Saint that, dutifully starved,  
 Froze, fought with beasts, was beaten and abused  
 And finally ridded of his flesh by fire, 1990  
 He kept life-long unspotted from the world !—  
 Next age, how goes the game, what mortal gives  
 His life and emulates Saint that, Saint this?  
 Men mutter, make excuse, or mutiny,  
 In fine are minded all to leave the new, 1995  
 Stick to the old,—enjoy old liberty,  
 No prejudice in enjoyment, if you please,  
 To the new profession : sin o' the sly, henceforth !  
 The law stands though the letter kills : what then ?  
 The spirit saves as unmistakeably. 2000  
 Omniscience sees, Omnipotence could stop,  
 Omnibenevolence pardons : it must be,  
 Frown law its fiercest, there's a wink somewhere !

Such was the logic in this head of mine :  
 I, like the rest, wrote “poison” on my bread, 2005  
 But broke and ate :—said “those that use the sword


“ Shall perish by the same ;” then stabbed my foe.  
I stand on solid earth, not empty air :  
Dislodge me, let your Pope’s crook hale me hence !  
Not he, nor you ! And I so pity both, 2010  
I ’ll make the true charge you want wit to make :  
“ Count Guido, who reveal our mystery,  
“ And trace all issues to the love of life :  
“ We having life to love and guard, like you,  
“ Why did you put us upon self-defence ? 2015  
“ You well knew what prompt pass-word would appease  
“ The sentry’s ire when folk infringe his bounds,  
“ And yet kept mouth shut : do you wonder then  
“ If, in mere decency, he shot you dead ?  
“ He can’t have people play such pranks as you 2020  
“ Beneath his nose at noonday, who disdain  
“ To give him an excuse before the world,  
“ By crying ‘ I break rule to save our camp ! ’  
“ Under the old rule, such offence were death ;  
“ And you had heard the Pontifex pronounce 2025  
“ ‘ Since you slay foe and violate the form,  
“ ‘ Slaying turns murder, which were sacrifice  
“ ‘ Had you, while, say, law-suiting foe to death,  
“ ‘ But raised an altar to the Unknown God,  
“ ‘ Or else the Genius of the Vatican.’ 2030

" Why then this pother?—all because the Pope,  
 " Doing his duty, cried 'A foreigner,  
 " ' You scandalize the natives : here at Rome  
 " ' *Romano vivitur more*: wise men, here,  
 " ' Put the Church forward and efface themselves. 2035  
 " ' The fit defence had been,—you stamped on wheat,  
 " ' Intending all the time to trample tares,—  
 " ' Were fain extirpate, then, the heretic,  
 " ' You now find, in your haste was slain a fool :  
 " ' Nor Pietro, nor Violante, nor your wife 2040  
 " ' Meant to breed up your babe a Molinist !  
 " ' Whence you are duly contrite. Not one word  
 " ' Of all this wisdom did you urge : which slip  
 " ' Death must atone for.' "

So, let death atone ! 2045

So ends mistake, so end mistakers !—end  
 Perhaps to recommence,—how should I know ?  
 Only, be sure, no punishment, no pain  
 Childish, preposterous, impossible,  
 But some such fate as Ovid could foresee,— 2050  
*Byblis in fluvium*, let the weak soul end  
 In water, *sed Lycaon in lupum*, but  
 The strong become a wolf for evermore !  
 Change that Pompilia to a puny stream

Fit to reflect the daisies on its bank ! 2055  
Let me turn wolf, be whole, and sate, for once,—  
Wallow in what is now a wolfishness  
Coerced too much by the humanity  
That 's half of me as well ! Grow out of man,  
Glut the wolf-nature,—what remains but grow 2060  
Into the man again, be man indeed  
And all man ? Do I ring the changes right ?  
Deformed, transformed, reformed, informed, conformed !  
The honest instinct, pent and crossed through life,  
Let surge by death into a visible flow 2065  
Of rapture : as the strangled thread of flame  
Painfully winds, annoying and annoyed,  
Malignant and maligned, thro' stone and ore,  
Till earth exclude the stranger : vented once,  
It finds full play, is recognized a-top 2070  
Some mountain as no such abnormal birth.  
Fire for the mount, the streamlet for the vale !  
Ay, of the water was that wife of mine—  
Be it for good, be it for ill, no run  
O' the red thread through that insignificance ! 2075  
Again, how she is at me with those eyes !  
Away with the empty stare ! Be holy still,  
And stupid ever ! Occupy your patch



Of private snow that 's somewhere in what world  
May now be growing icy round your head, 2080  
And aguish at your foot-print,—freeze not me,  
Dare follow not another step I take,  
Not with so much as those detested eyes,  
No, though they follow but to pray me pause  
On the incline, earth's edge that 's next to hell ! 2085  
None of your abnegation of revenge !  
Fly at me frank, tug while I tear again !  
There 's God, go tell Him, testify your worst !  
Not she ! There was no touch in her of hate :  
And it would prove her hell, if I reached mine ! 2090  
To know I suffered, would still sadden her,  
Do what the angels might to make amends !  
Therefore there 's either no such place as hell,  
Or thence shall I be thrust forth, for her sake,  
And thereby undergo three hells, not one— 2095  
I who, with outlet for escape to heaven,  
Would tarry if such flight allowed my foe  
To raise his head, relieved of that firm foot  
Had pinned him to the fiery pavement else !  
So am I made, " who did not make myself : " 2100  
(How dared she rob my own lip of the word ?)  
Beware me in what other world may be !—

Pompilia, who have brought me to this pass !  
All I know here, will I say there, and go  
Beyond the saying with the deed. Some use 2105  
There cannot but be for a mood like mine,  
Implacable, persistent in revenge.  
She maundered " All is over and at end :  
" I go my own road, go you where God will !  
" Forgive you ? I forget you ! " There 's the saint 2110  
That takes your taste, you other kind of men !  
How you had loved her ! Guido wanted skill  
To value such a woman at her worth !  
Properly the instructed criticize  
" What 's here, you simpleton have tossed to take 2115  
" It's chance i' the gutter ? This a daub, indeed ?  
" Why, 't is a Rafael that you kicked to rags ! "  
Perhaps so : some prefer the pure design :  
Give me my gorge of colour, glut of gold  
In a glory round the Virgin made for me ! 2120  
Titian 's the man, not Monk Angelico  
Who traces you some timid chalky ghost  
That turns the church into a charnel : ay,  
Just such a pencil might depict my wife !  
She,—since she, also, would not change herself,— 2125  
Why could not she come in some heart-shaped cloud,



Rainbowed about with riches, royalty  
Rimming her round, as round the tintless lawn  
Guardingly runs the selvage cloth of gold ?  
I would have left the faint fine gauze untouched, 2130  
Needle-worked over with its lily and rose,  
Let her bleach unmolested in the midst,  
Chill that selected solitary spot  
Of quietude she pleased to think was life :  
Purity, pallor grace the lawn no doubt 2135  
When there 's the costly bordure to unthread  
And make again an ingot : but what 's grace  
When you want meat and drink and clothes and fire ?  
A tale comes to my mind that 's apposite—  
Possibly true, probably false, a truth 2140  
Such as all truths we live by, Cardinal !  
'T is said, a certain ancestor of mine  
Followed—whoever was the potentate,  
To Paynimrie, and in some battle, broke  
Through more than due allowance of the foe, 2145  
And, risking much his own life, saved the lord's.  
Battered and bruised, the Emperor scrambles up,  
Rubs his eyes and looks round and sees my sire,  
Picks a furze-sprig from out his hauberk-joint,  
(Token how near the ground went majesty) 2150

And says "Take this, and if thou get safe home,  
" Plant the same in thy garden-ground to grow :  
" Run thence an hour in a straight line, and stop :  
" Describe a circle round (for central point)  
" The furze aforesaid, reaching every way 2155  
" The length of that hour's run : I give it thee,—  
" The central point, to build a castle there,  
" The space circumjacent, for fit demesne,  
" The whole to be thy children's heritage,—  
" Whom, for thy sake, bid thou wear furze on cap !"  
Those are my arms : we turned the furze a tree 2161  
To show more, and the greyhound tied thereto,  
Straining to start, means swift and greedy both ;  
He stands upon a triple mount of gold—  
By Jove, then, he 's escaping from true gold 2165  
And trying to arrive at empty air !  
Aha ! the fancy never crossed my mind !  
My father used to tell me, and subjoin  
" As for the castle, that took wings and flew :  
" The broad lands,—why, to traverse them to-day 2170  
" Scarce tasks my gouty feet, and in my prime  
" I doubt not I could stand and spit so far :  
" But for the furze, boy, fear no lack of that,  
" So long as fortune leaves one field to grub !

- “ Wherefore, hurra for furze and loyalty !” 2175  
What may I mean, where may the lesson lurk ?  
“ Do not bestow on man, by way of gift,  
“ Furze without land for framework,—vaunt no grace  
“ Of purity, no furze-sprig of a wife,  
“ To me, i’ the thick of battle for my bread, 2180  
“ Without some better dowry,—gold will do !”  
No better gift than sordid muck ? Yes, Sir !  
Many more gifts much better. Give them me !  
O those Olinpias bold, those Biancas brave, 2184  
That brought a husband power worth Ormuz’ wealth !  
Cried “ Thou being mine, why, what but thine am I ?  
“ Be thou to me law, right, wrong, heaven and hell !  
“ Let us blend souls, blent, thou in me, to bid  
“ Two bodies work one pleasure ! What are these 2189  
“ Called king, priest, father, mother, stranger, friend ?  
“ They fret thee or they frustrate ? Give the word—  
“ Be certain they shall frustrate nothing more !  
“ And who is this young florid foolishness  
“ That holds thy fortune in his pigmy clutch,  
“ —Being a prince and potency, forsooth !— 2195  
“ And hesitates to let the trifle go ?  
“ Let me but seal up eye, sing ear to sleep  
“ Sounder than Samson,—pounce thou on the prize

“ Shall slip from off my breast, and down couch-side  
“ And on to floor, and far as my lord’s feet— 2200  
“ Where he stands in the shadow with the sword,  
“ Waiting to see what Delilah dares do !  
“ Is the youth fair ? What is a man to me  
“ Who am thy call-bird ? Twist his neck — my  
    dupe’s,—  
“ Then take the breast shall turn a breast indeed !” 2205  
Such women are there ; and they marry whom ?  
Why, when a man has gone and hanged himself  
Because of what he calls a wicked wife,—  
See, if the very turpitude bemoaned,  
Prove not mere excellence the fool ignores ! 2210  
His monster is perfection,—Circe, sent  
Straight from the sun, with wand the idiot blames  
As not an honest distaff to spin wool !  
O thou Lucrezia, is it long to wait  
Yonder where all the gloom is in a glow 2215  
With thy suspected presence ?—virgin yet,  
Virtuous again, in face of what ’s to teach—  
Sin unimagined, unimaginable,—  
I come to claim my bride,—thy Borgia’s self  
Not half the burning bridegroom I shall be ! 2220  
Cardinal, take away your crucifix !

Abate, leave my lips alone,—they bite !  
Vainly you try to change what should not change,  
And cannot. I have bared, you bathe my heart—  
It grows the stonier for your saving dew ! 2225  
You steep the substance, you would lubricate,  
In waters that but touch to petrify !

You too are petrifications of a kind :  
Move not a muscle that shows mercy ; rave  
Another twelve hours, every word were waste ! 2230  
I thought you would not slay impenitence,  
But teased, from men you slew, contrition first,—  
I thought you had a conscience. Cardinal,  
You know I am wronged !—wronged, say, and wronged,  
maintain.

Was this strict inquisition made for blood 2235  
When first you showed us scarlet on your back,  
Called to the College ? Your straightforward way  
To your legitimate end,—I think it passed  
Over a scantling of heads brained, hearts broke,  
Lives trodden into dust !—how otherwise ? 2240  
Such was the way o' the world, and so you walked :  
Does memory haunt your pillow ? Not a whit.  
God wills you never pace your garden-path,

One appetizing hour ere dinner-time,  
But your intrusion there treads out of life 2245  
A universe of happy innocent things :  
Feel you remorse about that damsel-fly  
Which buzzed so near your mouth and flapped your face ?  
You blotted it from being at a blow :  
It was a fly, you were a man, and more, 2250  
Lord of created things, so took your course.  
Manliness, mind,—these are things fit to save,  
Fit to brush fly from : why, because I take  
My course, must needs the Pope kill me ?—kill you !  
You ! for this instrument, he throws away, 2255  
Is strong to serve a master, and were yours  
To have and hold and get much good from out !  
The Pope who dooms me, needs must die next year ;  
I 'll tell you how the chances are supposed  
For his successor : first the Chamberlain, 2260  
Old San Cesario,—Colloredo, next,—  
Then, one, two, three, four, I refuse to name ;  
After these, comes Altieri ; then come you—  
Seventh on the list you come, unless . . ha, ha,  
How can a dead hand give a friend a lift ? 2265  
Are you the person to despise the help  
O' the head shall drop in pannier presently ?

So a child seesaws on or kicks away  
The fulcrum-stone that 's all the sage requires  
To fit his lever to and move the world. 2270  
Cardinal, I adjure you in God's name,  
Save my life, fall at the Pope's feet, set forth  
Things your own fashion, not in words like these  
Made for a sense like yours who apprehend !  
Translate into the court-conventional 2275  
" Count Guido must not die, is innocent !  
" Fair, be assured ! But what an he were foul,  
" Blood-drenched and murder-crusted head to foot ?  
" Spare one whose death insults the Emperor,  
" Nay, outrages the Louis you so love ! 2280  
" He has friends who will avenge him ; enemies  
" Who will hate God now with impunity,  
" Missing the old coercive : would you send  
" A soul straight to perdition, dying frank  
" An atheist ? " Go and say this, for God's sake ! 2285  
—Why, you don't think I hope you 'll say one word ?  
Neither shall I persuade you from your stand  
Nor you persuade me from my station : take  
Your crucifix away, I tell you twice !  
  
Come, I am tired of silence ! Pause enough ! 2290

You have prayed : I have gone inside my soul  
And shut its door behind me : 't is your torch  
Makes the place dark : the darkness let alone  
Grows tolerable twilight : one may grope  
And get to guess at length and breadth and depth. 2295  
What is this fact I feel persuaded of—  
This something like a foothold in the sea,  
Although Saint Peter's bark scuds, billow-borne,  
Leaves me to founder where it flung me first ?  
Spite of your splashing, I am high and dry ! 2300  
God takes his own part in each thing he made ;  
Made for a reason, he conserves his work,  
Gives each its proper instinct of defence.  
My lamblike wife could neither bark nor bite,  
She bleated, bleated, till for pity pure, 2305  
The village roused it, ran with pole and prong  
To the rescue, and behold the wolf's at bay !  
Shall he try bleating?—or take turn or two,  
Since the wolf owns to kinship with the fox,  
And, failing to escape the foe by these, 2310  
Give up attempt, die fighting quietly ?  
The last bad blow that strikes fire in at eye  
And on to brain, and so out, life and all,  
How can it but be cheated of a pang



If, fighting quietly, the jaws enjoy 2315  
One re-embrace in mid back-bone they break,  
After their weary work thro' the foe's flesh ?  
That 's the wolf-nature. Do n't mistake my trope !  
A Cardinal so qualmish ? Eminence,  
My fight is figurative, blows i' the air, 2320  
Brain-war with powers and principalities,  
Spirit-bravado, no real fisticuffs !  
I shall not presently, when the knock comes,  
Cling to this bench nor claw the hangman's face,  
No, trust me ! I conceive worse lots than mine. 2325  
Whether it be, the old contagious fit  
And plague o' the prison have surprised me too,  
The appropriate drunkenness of the death-hour  
Crept on my sense, kind work o' the wine and myrrh,—  
I know not,—I begin to taste my strength, 2330  
Careless, gay even. What 's the worth of life ?  
The Pope 's dead now, my murderous old man,  
For Tozzi told me so : and you, forsooth—  
Why, you do n't think, Abate, do your best,  
You 'll live a year more with that hacking cough 2335  
And blotch of crimson where the cheek 's a pit ?  
Tozzi has got you also down in book !  
Cardinal, only seventh of seventy near,

Is not one called Albano in the lot?  
Go eat your heart, you 'll never be a Pope ! 2340  
Inform me, is it true you left your love,  
A Pucci, for promotion in the church ?  
She 's more than in the church,—in the churchyard !  
Plautilla Pucci, your affianced bride,  
Has dust now in the eyes that held the love,— 2345  
And Martinez, suppose they make you Pope,  
Stops that with *veto*,—so, enjoy yourself !  
I see you all reel to the rock, you waves—  
Some forthright, some describe a sinuous track,  
Some, crested brilliantly, with heads above, 2350  
Some in a strangled swirl sunk who knows how,  
But all bound whither the main-current sets,  
Rockward, an end in foam for all of you !  
What if I be o'ertaken, pushed to the front  
By all you crowding smoother souls behind, 2355  
And reach, a minute sooner than was meant,  
The boundary whereon I break to mist ?  
Go to ! the smoothest safest of you all,  
Most perfect and compact wave in my train,  
Spite of the blue tranquility above, 2360  
Spite of the breadth before of lapsing peace,  
Where broods the halcyon and the fish leaps free,

Will presently begin to feel the prick  
At lazy heart, the push at torpid brain,  
Will rock vertiginously in turn, and reel, 2365  
And, emulative, rush to death like me.  
Later or sooner by a minute then,  
So much for the untimeliness of death !  
And, as regards the manner that offends,  
The rude and rough, I count the same for gain. 2370  
Be the act harsh and quick ! Undoubtedly  
The soul 's condensed and, twice itself, expands  
To burst thro' life, in alternation due,  
Into the other state whate'er it prove.  
You never know what life means till you die : 2375  
Even throughout life, 't is death that makes life live,  
Gives it whatever the significance.  
For see, on your own ground and argument,  
Suppose life had no death to fear, how find  
A possibility of nobleness 2380  
In man, prevented daring any more ?  
What 's love, what 's faith without a worst to dread ?  
Lack-lustre jewelry ! but faith and love  
With death behind them bidding do or die—  
Put such a foil at back, the sparkle 's born ! 2385  
From out myself how the strange colours come !

Is there a new rule in another world ?  
Be sure I shall resign myself : as here  
I recognized no law I could not see,  
There, what I see, I shall acknowledge too : 2390  
On earth I never took the Pope for God,  
In heaven I shall scarce take God for the Pope.  
Unmanned, remanned : I hold it probable—  
With something changeless at the heart of me  
To know me by, some nucleus that 's myself : 2395  
Accretions did it wrong ? Away with them—  
You soon shall see the use of fire !

Till when,

All that was, is ; and must forever be.  
Nor is it in me to unhate my hates,— 2400  
I use up my last strength to strike once more  
Old Pietro in the wine-house-gossip-face,  
To trample underfoot the whine and wile  
Of beast Violante,—and I grow one gorge  
To loathingly reject Pompilia's pale 2405  
Poison my hasty hunger took for food.  
A strong tree wants no wreaths about its trunk,  
No cloying cups, no sickly sweet of scent,  
But sustenance at root, a bucketful.

How else lived that Athenian who died so, 2410  
Drinking hot bull's blood, fit for men like me ?  
I lived and died a man, and take man's chance,  
Honest and bold : right will be done to such.

Who are these you have let descend my stair ?  
Ha, their accursed psalm ! Lights at the sill ! 2415  
Is it "Open " they dare bid you ? Treachery !  
Sirs, have I spoken one word all this while  
Out of the world of words I had to say ?  
Not one word ! All was folly—I laughed and mocked !  
Sirs, my first true word, all truth and no lie, 2420  
Is—save me notwithstanding ! Life is all !  
I was just stark mad,—let the madman live  
Pressed by as many chains as you please pile !  
Do n't open ! Hold me from them ! I am yours,  
I am the Granduke's—no, I am the Pope's ! 2425  
Abate,—Cardinal,—Christ,—Maria,—God, . . .  
Pompilia, will you let them murder me ?

XII.

THE BOOK AND THE RING.

HERE were the end, had anything an end :  
Thus, lit and launched, up and up roared and soared  
A rocket, till the key o' the vault was reached,  
And wide heaven held, a breathless minute-space,  
In brilliant usurpature : thus caught spark, 5  
Rushed to the height, and hung at full of fame  
Over men's upturned faces, ghastly thence,  
Our glaring Guido : now decline must be.  
In its explosion, you have seen his act,  
By my power—may-be, judged it by your own,— 10  
Or composite as good orbs prove, or crammed  
With worse ingredients than the Wormwood Star.  
The act, over and ended, falls and fades :

---

What was once seen, grows what is now described,  
Then talked of, told about, a tinge the less . 15  
In every fresh transmission ; till it melts,  
Trickles in silent orange or wan grey  
Across our memory, dies and leaves all dark,  
And presently we find the stars again.  
Follow the main streaks, meditate the mode 20  
Of brightness, how it hastes to blend with black !

After that February Twenty-Two,  
Since our salvation, Sixteen-Ninety-Eight,  
Of all reports that were, or may have been,  
Concerning those the day killed or let live, 25  
Four I count only. Take the first that comes.  
A letter from a stranger, man of rank,  
Venetian visitor at Rome,—who knows,  
On what pretence of busy idleness ?  
Thus he begins on evening of that day. 30

---

“ Here are we at our end of Carnival ;  
“ Prodigious gaiety and monstrous mirth,  
“ And constant shift of entertaining show :

- 
- “ With influx, from each quarter of the globe,  
“ Of strangers nowise wishful to be last 35  
“ I’ the struggle for a good place presently  
“ When that befalls, fate cannot long defer.  
“ The old Pope totters on the verge o’ the grave :  
“ You see, Malpichi understood far more  
“ Than Tozzi how to treat the ailments : age, 40  
“ No question, renders these inveterate.  
“ Cardinal Spada, actual Minister,  
“ Is possible Pope ; I wager on his head,  
“ Since those four entertainments of his niece  
“ Which set all Rome a-stare : Pope probably— 45  
“ Though Colloredo has his backers too,  
“ And San Cesario makes one doubt at times :  
“ Altieri will be Chamberlain at most.
- “ A week ago the sun was warm like May,  
“ And the old man took daily exercise 50  
“ Along the river-side ; he loves to see  
“ That Custom-house he built upon the bank,  
“ For, Naples-born, his tastes are maritime :  
“ But yesterday he had to keep in-doors  
“ Because of the outrageous rain that fell. 55  
“ On such days the good soul has fainting-fits,



- 
- “ Or lies in stupor, scarcely makes believe  
“ Of minding business, fumbles at his beads.  
“ They say, the trust that keeps his heart alive  
“ Is that, by lasting till December next, 60  
“ He may hold Jubilee a second time,  
“ And, twice in one reign, ope the Holy Doors.  
“ By the way, somebody responsible  
“ Assures me that the King of France has writ  
“ Fresh orders : Fenelon will be condemned : 65  
“ The Cardinal makes a wry face enough,  
“ Having a love for the delinquent : still,  
“ He ’s the ambassador, must press the point.  
“ Have you a wager too, dependent here ?
- “ Now, from such matters to divert awhile, 70  
“ Hear of to-day’s event which crowns the week,  
“ Casts all the other wagers into shade.  
“ Tell Dandolo I owe him fifty drops  
“ Of heart’s blood in the shape of gold zecchines !  
“ The Pope has done his worst : I have to pay 75  
“ For the execution of the Count, by Jove !  
“ Two days since, I reported him as safe,  
“ Re-echoing the conviction of all Rome :  
“ Who could suspect its one deaf ear—the Pope’s ?

- " But prejudices grow insuperable, 80  
 " And that old enmity to Austria, that  
 " Passion for France and France's pageant-king  
 " (Of which, why pause to multiply the proofs  
 " Now scandalously rife in Europe's mouth ?)  
 " These fairly got the better in the man 85  
 " Of justice, prudence, and *esprit de corps*,  
 " And he persisted in the butchery.  
 " Also, 't is said that in his latest walk  
 " To that Dogana-by-the-Bank, he built,  
 " The crowd,—he suffers question, unrebuked,— 90  
 " Asked, ' Whether murder was a privilege  
 " ' Only reserved for nobles like the Count ?'  
 " And he was ever mindful of the mob.  
 " Martinez, the Cæsarian Minister,  
 " —Who used his best endeavours to spare blood, 95  
 " And strongly pleaded for the life ' of one,'  
 " Urged he, ' I may have dined at table with !'—  
 " He will not soon forget the Pope's rebuff,  
 " —Feels the slight sensibly, I promise you !  
 " And but for the dissuasion of two eyes 100  
 " That make with him foul weather or fine day,  
 " He had abstained, nor graced the spectacle :  
 " As it was, barely would he condescend

- 
- “ Look forth from the *palchetto* where he sat  
“ Under the Pincian : we shall hear of this ! 105  
“ The substituting, too, the People’s Square  
“ For the out-o’-the-way old quarter by the Bridge,  
“ Was meant as a conciliatory sop  
“ To the mob ; it gave one holiday the more.  
“ But the French Embassy might unfurl flag,— 110  
“ Still the good luck of France to fling a foe !  
“ Cardinal Bouillon triumphs properly !  
“ *Palchetti* were erected in the Place,  
“ And houses, at the edge of the Three Streets,  
“ Let their front windows at six dollars each : 115  
“ Anguisciola, that patron of the arts,  
“ Hired one ; our Envoy Contarini too.
- “ Now for the thing ; no sooner the decree  
“ Gone forth,—’t is four-and-twenty hours ago,—  
“ Than Acciaïoli and Panciatichi, 120  
“ Old friends, indeed compatriots of the man,  
“ Being pitched on as the couple properest  
“ To intimate the sentence yesternight,  
“ Were closeted ere cock-crow with the Count.  
“ They both report their efforts to dispose 125  
“ The unhappy nobleman for ending well,

- “ Despite the natural sense of injury,  
“ Were crowned at last with a complete success.  
“ And when the Company of Death arrived  
“ At twenty-hours,—the way they reckon here,— 130  
“ We say, at sunset, after dinner-time,—  
“ The Count was led down, hoisted up on car,  
“ Last of the five, as heinous, you know :  
“ Yet they allowed one whole car to each man.  
“ His intrepidity, nay, nonchalance, 135  
“ As up he stood and down he sat himself,  
“ Struck admiration into those who saw.  
“ Then the procession started, took the way  
“ From the New Prisons by the Pilgrim’s Street,  
“ The street of the Governo, Pasquin’s Street, 140  
“ (Where was stuck up, mid other epigrams,  
“ A quatrain . . but of all that, presently !)  
“ The Place Navona, the Pantheon’s Place,  
“ Place of the Column, last the Corso’s length,  
“ And so debouched thence at Mannaia’s foot 145  
“ I’ the Place o’ the People. As is evident,  
“ (Despite the malice,—plainly meant, I fear,  
“ By this abrupt change of locality,—  
“ The Square’s no such bad place to head and hang)  
“ We had the titillation as we sat 150

- 
- “ Assembled, (quality in conclave, ha ?)
- “ Of, minute after minute, some report
- “ How the slow show was winding on its way.
- “ Now did a car run over, kill a man,
- “ Just opposite a pork-shop numbered Twelve : 155
- “ And bitter were the outcries of the mob
- “ Against the Pope : for, but that he forbids
- “ The Lottery, why, Twelve were Tern Quatern !
- “ Now did a beggar by Saint Agnes, lame
- “ From his youth up, recover use of leg, 160
- “ Through prayer of Guido as he glanced that way :
- “ So that the crowd near crammed his hat with coin.
- “ Thus was kept up excitement to the last,
- “ — Not an abrupt out-bolting, as of yore,
- “ From Castle, over Bridge and on to block, 165
- “ And so all ended ere you well could wink !
- 
- “ To mount the scaffold-steps, Guido was last
- “ Here also, as atrociouslest in crime.
- “ We hardly noticed how the peasants died,
- “ They dangled somehow soon to right and left, 170
- “ And we remained all ears and eyes, could give
- “ Ourselves to Guido undividedly,
- “ As he harangued the multitude beneath.

“ He begged forgiveness on the part of God,  
“ And fair construction of his act from men, 175  
“ Whose suffrage he entreated for his soul,  
“ Suggesting that we should forthwith repeat  
“ A *Pater* and an *Ave*, with the hymn  
“ *Salve Regina Cæli*, for his sake.  
“ Which said, he turned to the confessor, crossed 180  
“ And reconciled himself, with decency,  
“ Oft glancing at Saint Mary’s opposite  
“ Where they possess, and showed in shrine to-day,  
“ The Blessed *Umbilicus* of our Lord,  
“ (A relic ’t is believed no other church 185  
“ In Rome can boast of)—then rose up, as brisk  
“ Knelt down again, bent head, adapted neck,  
“ And, with the name of Jesus on his lips,  
“ Received the fatal blow.

“ The headsman showed 190  
“ The head to the populace. Must I avouch  
“ We strangers own to disappointment here?  
“ Report pronounced him fully six feet high,  
“ Youngish, considering his fifty years,  
“ And, if not handsome, dignified at least. 195  
“ Indeed, it was no face to please a wife !

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" His friends say, this was caused by the costume :  
 " He wore the dress he did the murder in,  
 " That is, a *just-a-corps* of russet serge,  
 " Black camisole, coarse cloak of baracan 200  
 " (So they style here the garb of goat's-hair cloth)  
 " White hat and cotton cap beneath, poor Count,  
 " Preservative against the evening dews  
 " During the journey from Arezzo. Well,  
 " So died the man, and so his end was peace ; 205  
 " Whence many a moral were to meditate.  
 " Spada,—you may bet Dandolo,— is Pope !  
 " Now for the quatrain ! "

---

No, friend, this will do !

You 've sputtered into sparks. What streak comes next ?

A letter : Don Giacinto Arcangeli, 211  
 Doctor and Proctor, him I made you mark  
 Buckle to business in his study late,  
 The virtuous sire, the valiant for the truth,  
 Acquaints his correspondent,—Florentine, 215  
 By name Cencini, advocate as well,  
*Socius* and brother-in-the-devil to match,—

A friend of Franceschini, anyhow,  
And knit up with the bowels of the case,—  
Acquaints him, (in this paper that I touch) 220  
How their joint effort to obtain reprieve  
For Guido had so nearly nicked the nine  
And ninety and one over,—he would say,  
At Tarocs,—or succeeded,—in our phrase.  
To this Cencini's care I owe the Book, 225  
The yellow thing I take and toss once more,—  
How will it be, my four-years'-intimate,  
When thou and I part company anon?—  
'T was hé, the "whole position of the case,"  
Pleading and summary, were put before ; 230  
Discreetly in my Book he bound them all,  
Adding some three epistles to the point.  
Here is the first of these, part fresh as penned,  
The sand, that dried the ink, not rubbed away,  
Though penned the day whereof it tells the deed : 235  
Part—extant just as plainly, you know where,  
Whence came the other stuff, went, you know how,  
To make the ring that 's all but round and done.

---



- “ Late they arrived, too late, egregious Sir,  
“ Those same justificative points you urge 240  
“ Might benefit His Blessed Memory  
“ Count Guido Franceschini now with God :  
“ Since the Court,—to state things succinctly,—styled  
“ The Congregation of the Governor,  
“ Having resolved on Tuesday last our cause 245  
“ I’ the guilty sense, with death for punishment,  
“ Spite of all pleas by me deducible  
“ In favour of said Blessed Memory,—  
“ I, with expenditure of pains enough,  
“ Obtained a respite, leave to claim and prove 250  
“ Exemption from the law’s award,—alleged  
“ The power and privilege o’ the Clericate :  
“ To which effect a courier was despatched.  
“ But ere an answer from Arezzo came,  
“ The Holiness of our Lord the Pope (prepare !) 255  
“ Judging it inexpedient to postpone  
“ The execution of such sentence passed,  
“ Saw fit, by his particular chirograph,  
“ To derogate, dispense with privilege,  
“ And wink at any hurt accruing thence 260  
“ To Mother Church through damage of her son :  
“ Also, to overpass and set aside

- “ That other plea on score of tender age, .  
“ Put forth by me to do Pasquini good,  
“ One of the four in trouble with our friend. 265  
“ So that all five, to-day, have suffered death  
“ With no distinction save in dying,—he,  
“ Decollate by mere due of privilege,  
“ The rest hanged decently and in order. Thus  
“ Came the Count to his end of gallant man, 270  
“ Defunct in faith and exemplarity :  
“ Nor shall the shield of his great House lose shine  
“ Thereby, nor its blue banner blush to red.  
“ This, too, should yield sustainment to our hearts—  
“ He had commiseration and respect 275  
“ In his decease from universal Rome,  
“ *Quantum est hominum venustiorum*,  
“ The nice and cultivated everywhere :  
“ Though, in respect of me his advocate,  
“ Needs must I groan o’er my debility, 280  
“ Attribute the untoward event o’ the strife  
“ To nothing but my own crass ignorance  
“ Which failed to set the valid reasons forth,  
“ Find fit excuse : such is the fate of war !  
“ May God compensate us the direful blow, 285  
“ By future blessings on his family

" Whereof I lowly beg the next commands ;

" —Whereto, as humbly, I confirm myself . . . "

And so forth,—follow name and place and date.

On next leaf—

290

" *Hactenus senioribus !*

" There, old fox, show the clients t' other side

" And keep this corner sacred, I beseech !

" You and your pleas and proofs were what folks call

" Pisan assistance, aid that comes too late, 295

" Saves a man dead as nail in post of door.

" Had I but time and space for narrative !

" What was the good of twenty Clericates

" When Somebody's thick headpiece once was bent

" On seeing Guido's drop into the bag ? 300

" How these old men like giving youth a push !

" So much the better : next push goes to him,

" And a new Pope begins the century.

" Much good I get by my superb defence !

" But argument is solid and subsists, 305

" While obstinacy and ineptitude

" Accompany the owner to his tomb ;

" What do I care how soon ? Beside, folks see !

" Rome will have relished heartily the show,

---

“ Yet understood the motives, never fear, 310

“ Which caused the indecent change o’ the People’s  
Place

“ To the People’s Playground,—stigmatize the spite

“ Which in a trice precipitated things !

“ As oft the moribund will give a kick

“ To show they are not absolutely dead, 315

“ So feebleness i’ the socket shoots its last,

“ A spirt of violence for energy !

“ But thou, Cencini, brother of my breast,

“ O fox, whose home is ’mid the tender grape,

“ Whose couch in Tuscany by Themis’ throne, 320

“ Subject to no such . . . but I shut my mouth

“ Or only open it again to say,

“ This pother and confusion fairly laid,

“ My hands are empty and my satchel lank.

“ Now then for both the Matrimonial Cause 325

“ And the case of Gomez ! Serve them hot and hot !

“ *Reliqua differamus in crastinum !*

“ The impatient estafette cracks whip outside :

“ Still, though the earth should swallow him who swears

“ And me who make the mischief, in must slip— 330

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- 
- “ My boy, your godson, fat-chaps Hyacinth,  
“ Enjoyed the sight while Papa plodded here.  
“ I promised him, the rogue, a month ago,  
“ The day his birthday was, of all the days,  
“ That if I failed to save Count Guido’s head, 335  
“ Cinuccio should at least go see it chopped  
“ From trunk—‘ So, latinize your thanks !’ quoth I  
“ ‘ That I prefer, *hoc malim*,’ raps me out  
“ The rogue : you notice the subjunctive ? Ah !  
“ Accordingly he sat there, bold in box, 340  
“ Proud as the Pope behind the peacock-fans :  
“ Whereon a certain lady-patroness  
“ For whom I manage things (my boy in front,  
“ Her Marquis sat the third in evidence ;  
“ Boys have no eyes nor ears save for the show) 345  
“ ‘ This time, Cintino,’ was her sportive word,  
“ When whiz and thump went axe and mowed lay man,  
“ And folks could fall to the suspended chat,  
“ ‘ This time, you see, Bottini rules the roast,  
“ ‘ Nor can Papa with all his eloquence 350  
“ ‘ Be reckoned on to help as heretofore !’  
“ Whereat Cinone pouts ; then, sparkishly—  
“ ‘ Papa knew better than aggrieve his Pope,  
“ ‘ And baulk him of his grudge against our Count,
-

- “ ‘ Else he ’d have argued-off Bottini’s ’ . . what ? 355  
“ ‘ His nose,—the rogue ! well parried of the boy !  
“ He ’s long since out of Cæsar (eight years old)  
“ And as for tripping in Eutropius . . well,  
“ Reason the more that we strain every nerve  
“ To do him justice, mould a model-mouth, 360  
“ A Bartolus-cum-Baldo for next age :  
“ For that I purse the pieces, work the brain,  
“ And want both Gomez and the marriage-case,  
“ Success with which shall plaster aught of pate  
“ That ’s broken in me by Bottini’s flail, 365  
“ And bruise his own, belike, that wags and brags.  
“ *Adverti supplico humiliter*  
“ *Quod*, do n’t the fungus see, the fop divine  
“ That one hand drives two horses, left and right ?  
“ With this rein did I rescue from the ditch 370  
“ The fortune of our Franceschini, keep  
“ Unsplashed the credit of a noble House,  
“ And set the fashionable cause at Rome  
“ A-prancing till bystanders shouted ‘ ’ware ! ’  
“ The other rein’s judicious management 375  
“ Suffered old Somebody to keep the pace,  
“ Hobblyingly play the roadster : who but he  
“ Had his opinion, was not led by the nose

---

“ In leash of quibbles strung to look like law !  
“ You ’ll soon see,—when I go to pay devoir 380  
“ And compliment him on confuting me,—  
“ If, by a back-swing of the pendulum,  
“ Grace be not, thick and threefold, consequent !  
“ ‘ I must decide as I see proper, Don !  
“ ‘ The Pope, I have my inward lights for guide. 385  
“ ‘ Had learning been the matter in dispute,  
“ ‘ Could eloquence avail to gainsay fact,  
“ ‘ Yours were the victory, be comforted !’  
“ Cinuzzo will be gainer by it all.  
“ Quick then with Gomez, hot and hot next case !” 390

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Follows, a letter, takes the other side.

Tall blue-eyed Fisc whose head is capped with cloud,  
Doctor Bottini,—to no matter who,  
Writes on the Monday two days afterward. .  
Now shall the honest championship of right, 395  
Crowned with success, enjoy at last, unblamed,  
Moderate triumph ! Now shall eloquence  
Poured forth in fancied floods for virtue’s sake,  
(The print is sorrowfully dyked and dammed,

But shows where fain the unbridled force would flow, 400  
Finding a channel)—now shall this refresh  
The thirsty donor with a drop or two !  
Here has been truth at issue with a lie :  
Let who gained truth the day have handsome pride  
In his own prowess ! Eh ? What ails the man ? 405

---

“ Well, it is over, ends as I foresaw :  
“ Easily proved, Pompilia’s innocence !  
“ Catch them entrusting Guido’s guilt to me !  
“ I had, as usual, the plain truth to plead.  
“ I always knew the clearness of the stream 410  
“ Would show the fish so thoroughly, child might prong  
“ The clumsy monster : with no mud to splash,  
“ Small credit to lynx-eye and lightning-spear !  
“ This Guido,—(much sport he contrived to make,  
“ Who at first twist, preamble of the cord, 415  
“ Turned white, told all, like the poltroon he was !)—  
“ Finished, as you expect, a penitent,  
“ Fully confessed his crime, and made amends,  
“ And, edifying Rome last Saturday,  
“ Died like a saint, poor devil ! That ’s the man 420



- “ The gods still give to my antagonist :  
“ Imagine how Arcangeli claps wing,  
“ And crows ! ‘ Such formidable facts to face,  
“ ‘ So naked to attack, my client here,  
“ ‘ And yet I kept a month the Fisc at bay, 425  
“ ‘ And in the end had foiled him of the prize  
“ ‘ By this arch-stroke, this plea of privilege,  
“ ‘ But that the Pope must gratify his whim,  
“ ‘ Put in his word, poor old man,—let it pass !’  
“ —Such is the cue to which all Rome responds. 430  
“ What with the plain truth given me to uphold,  
“ And, should I let truth slip, the Pope at hand  
“ To pick up, steady her on legs again,  
“ My office turns a pleasantry indeed !  
“ Not that the burly boaster did one jot 435  
“ O’ the little was to do—young Spreti’s work !  
“ But for him,—mannikin and dandiprat,  
“ Mere candle-end and inch of cleverness’  
“ Stuck on Arcangeli’s save-all,—but for him  
“ The spruce young Spreti, what is bad were worse ! 440
- “ I looked that Rome should have the natural gird  
“ At advocate with case that proves itself ;  
“ I knew Arcangeli would grin and brag :

“ But what say you to one impertinence  
“ Might move a stoic? That monk, you are to know,  
“ That barefoot Augustinian whose report 446  
“ O’ the dying woman’s words did detriment  
“ To my best points it took the freshness from,  
“ —That meddler preached to purpose yesterday  
“ At San Lorenzo as a winding-up 450  
“ O’ the show which proved a treasure to the church.  
“ Out comes his sermon smoking from the press :  
“ Its text—‘ Let God be true, and every man  
“ ‘ A liar ’—and its application, this,  
“ The longest-winded of the paragraphs, 455  
“ I straight unstitch, tear out and treat you with :  
“ ’T is piping hot and posts through Rome to-day.  
“ Remember it, as I engage to do !

---

“ But if you rather be disposed to see  
“ In the result of the long trial here,— 460  
“ This dealing doom to guilt and doling praise  
“ To innocence,—any proof that truth  
“ May look for vindication from the world,  
“ Much will you have misread the signs, I say.

- “ God, who seems acquiescent in the main 465  
“ Will those who add ‘ So will he ever sleep ’—  
“ Flutters their foolishness from time to time,  
“ Puts forth his right-hand recognizably ;  
“ Even as, to fools who deem he needs must right  
“ Wrong on the instant, as if earth were heaven, 470  
“ He wakes remonstrance—‘ Passive, Lord, how long ? ’  
“ Because Pompilia’s purity prevails,  
“ Conclude you, all truth triumphs in the end ?  
“ So might those old inhabitants of the ark,  
“ Witnessing haply their dove’s safe return, 475  
“ Pronounce there was no danger all the while  
“ O’ the deluge, to the creature’s counterparts,  
“ Aught that beat wing i’ the world, was white or soft,—  
“ And that the lark, the thrush, the culver too,  
“ Might equally have traversed air, found earth, 480  
“ And brought back olive-branch in unharmed bill.  
“ Methinks I hear the Patriarch’s warning voice—  
“ ‘ Though this one breast, by miracle, return,  
“ ‘ No wave rolls by, in all the waste, but bears  
“ ‘ Within it some dead dove-like thing as dear, 485  
“ ‘ Beauty made blank and harmlessness destroyed ! ’  
“ How many chaste and noble sister-fames  
“ Wanted the extricating hand, and lie

“ Strangled, for one Pompilia proud above  
“ The welter, plucked from the world’s calumny, 490  
“ Stupidity, simplicity,—who cares ?

“ Romans ! An elder race possessed your land  
“ Long ago, and a false faith lingered still,  
“ As shades do, though the morning-star be out.  
“ Doubtless some pagan of the twilight-day 495  
“ Has often pointed to a cavern-mouth,  
“ Obnoxious to beholders, hard by Rome,  
“ And said,—nor he a bad man, no, nor fool,—  
“ Only a man, so, blind like all his mates,—  
“ ‘ Here skulk in safety, lurk, defying law, 500  
“ ‘ The devotees to execrable creed,  
“ ‘ Adoring—with what culture . . Jove, avert  
“ ‘ Thy vengeance from us worshippers of thee ! . .  
“ ‘ What rights obscene—their idol-god an Ass !’  
“ So went the word forth, so acceptance found, 505  
“ So century re-echoed century,  
“ Cursed the accursed,—and so, from sire to son,  
“ You Romans cried ‘ The offscourings of our race,  
“ ‘ Corrupt within the depths there : fitly, fiends  
“ ‘ Perform a temple-service o’er the dead : 510  
“ ‘ Child, gather garment round thee, pass nor pry !’

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- “ So groaned your generations : till the time  
“ Grew ripe, and lightning hath revealed, belike,—  
“ Thro’ crevice peeped into by curious fear,—  
“ Some object even fear could recognize 515  
“ I’ the place of spectres ; on the illumined wall,  
“ To-wit, some nook, tradition talks about,  
“ Narrow and short, a corpse’s length no more :  
“ And by it, in the due receptacle,  
“ The little rude brown lamp of earthenware, 520  
“ The cruse, was meant for flowers, but held the blood,  
“ The rough-scratched palm-branch, and the legend left  
“ *Pro Christo*. Then the mystery lay clear :  
“ The abhorred one was a martyr all the time,  
“ A saint whereof earth was not worthy. What? 525  
“ Do you continue in the old belief?  
“ Where blackness bides unbroke, must devils be ?  
“ Is it so certain, not another cell  
“ O’ the myriad that make up the catacomb,  
“ Contains some saint a second flash would show? 530  
“ Will you ascend into the light of day  
“ And, having recognized a martyr’s shrine,  
“ Go join the votaries that gape around  
“ Each vulgar god that awes the market-place ?  
“ Are these the objects of your praising? See! 535
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- “ In the outstretched right hand of Apollo, there,  
“ Is screened a scorpion : housed amid the folds  
“ Of Juno’s mantle, lo, a cockatrice !  
“ Each statue of a god were fitlier styled  
“ Demon and devil. Glorify no brass 540  
“ That shines like burnished gold in noonday glare,  
“ For fools ! Be otherwise instructed, you !  
“ And preferably ponder, ere ye pass,  
“ Each incident of this strange human play  
“ Privily acted on a theatre, 545  
“ Was deemed secure from every gaze but God’s,—  
“ Till, of a sudden, earthquake lays wall low  
“ And lets the world see the wild work inside,  
“ And how, in petrification of surprise,  
“ The actors stand,—raised arm and planted foot,— 550  
“ Mouth as it made, eye as it evidenced,  
“ Despairing shriek, triumphant hate,—transfixed,  
“ Both he who takes and she who yields the life.
- “ As ye become spectators of this scene—  
“ Watch obscuration of a fame pearl-pure 555  
“ In vapoury films, enwoven circumstance,  
“ —A soul made weak by its pathetic want  
“ Of just the first apprenticeship to sin,

“ Would thenceforth make the sinning soul secure  
“ From all foes save itself, that ’s trueliest foe,— 560  
“ For egg turned snake needs fear no serpentry,—  
“ As ye behold this web of circumstance  
“ Deepen the more for every thrill and throe,  
“ Convulsive effort to disperse the films  
“ And disenmesh the fame o’ the martyr,—mark 565  
“ How all those means, the unfriended one pursues,  
“ ‘To keep the treasure trusted to her breast,  
“ Each struggle in the flight from death to life,  
“ How all, by procurement of the powers  
“ Of darkness, are transformed,—no single ray, 570  
“ Shot forth to show and save the inmost star,  
“ But, passed as through hell’s prism, proceeding black  
“ To the world that hates white: as ye watch, I say,  
“ Till dusk and such defacement grow eclipse  
“ By,—marvellous perversity of man !— 575  
“ The inadequacy and inaptitude  
“ Of that self-same machine, that very law  
“ Man vaunts, devised to dissipate the gloom,  
“ Rescue the drowning orb from calumny,  
“ —Hear law, appointed to defend the just, 580  
“ Submit, for best defence, that wickedness  
“ Was bred of flesh and innate with the bone

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- “ Borne by Pompilia’s spirit for a space,  
“ And no mere chance fault, passionate and brief :  
“ Finally, when ye find,—after this touch 585  
“ Of man’s protection which intends to mar  
“ The last pin-point of light and damn the disc,—  
“ One wave of the hand of God amid the worlds  
“ Bid vapour vanish, darkness flee away,  
“ And leave the vexed star culminate in peace 590  
“ Approachable no more by earthly mist—  
“ What I call God’s hand,—you, perhaps,—this chance  
“ Of the true instinct of an old good man  
“ Who happens to hate darkness and love light,—  
“ In whom too was the eye that saw, not dim, 595  
“ The natural force to do the thing he saw,  
“ Nowise abated,—both by miracle,—  
“ All this well pondered,—I demand assent  
“ To the enunciation of my text  
“ In face of one proof more that ‘ God is true 600  
“ ‘ And every man a liar ’—that who trusts  
“ To human testimony for a fact  
“ Gets this sole fact—himself is proved a fool ;  
“ Man’s speech being false, if but by consequence  
“ That only strength is true ! while man is weak, 605  
“ And, since truth seems reserved for heaven not earth,



“ Plagued here by earth’s prerogative of lies,  
“ Now learns to love and long for what, one day,  
“ Approved by life’s probation, he may speak.

“ For me, the weary and the worn, who prompt      610  
“ To mirth or pity, as I move the mood,—  
“ A friar who glides unnoticed to the grave,  
“ With these bare feet, coarse robe and rope-girt waist,—  
“ I have long since renounced your world, ye know :  
“ Yet what forbids I weigh the prize forgone,      615  
“ The worldly worth ? I dare, as I were dead,  
“ Disinterestedly judge this and that  
“ Good ye account good : but God tries the heart.  
“ Still, if you question me of my content  
“ At having put each human pleasure by,      620  
“ I answer, at the urgency of truth :  
“ As this world seems, I dare not say I know  
“ —Apart from Christ’s assurance which decides—  
“ Whether I have not failed to taste much joy.  
“ For many a doubt would fain perturb my choice— 625  
“ Many a dream of life spent otherwise—  
“ How human love, in varied shapes, might work  
“ As glory, or as rapture, or as grace :  
“ How conversancy with the books that teach,

- “The arts that help,—how, to grow good and great,  
“Rather than simply good, and bring thereby 631  
“Goodness to breathe and live, nor, born i’ the brain,  
“Die there,—how these and many another gift  
“Of life are precious though abjured by me.  
“But, for one prize, best meed of mightiest man, 635  
“Arch-object of ambition,—earthly praise,  
“Repute o’ the world, the flourish of loud trump,  
“The softer social fluting,—Oh, for these,  
“—No, my friends! Fame,—that bubble which, world-  
wide  
“Each blows and bids his neighbour lend a breath, 640  
“That so he haply may behold thereon  
“One more enlarged distorted false fool’s-face,  
“Until some glassy nothing grown as big  
“Send by a touch the imperishable to suds,—  
“No, in renouncing fame, my loss was light, 645  
“Choosing obscurity, my chance was well!”
- 

Didst ever touch such ampollosity  
As the man’s own bubble, let alone its spite?  
What ’s his speech for, but just the fame he flouts?

How he dares reprehend both high and low, 650  
Nor stoops to turn the sentence "God is true  
"And every man a liar—save the Pope  
"Happily reigning—my respects to him!"  
—So, rounding off the period. Molinism  
Simple and pure! To what pitch get we next? 655  
I find that, for first pleasant consequence,  
Gomez, who had intended to appeal  
From the absurd decision of the Court,  
Declines, though plain enough his privilege,  
To call on help from lawyers any more— 660  
Resolves the liars may possess the world,  
Till God have had sufficiency of both:  
So may I whistle for my job and fee!

But, for this virulent and rabid monk,—  
If law be an inadequate machine, 665  
And advocacy, froth and impotence,  
We shall soon see, my blatant brother! That's  
Exactly what I hope to show your sort!  
For, by a veritable piece of luck,  
The providence, you monks round period with, 670  
All may be gloriously retrieved. Perpend!

That Monastery of the Convertites  
Whereto the Court consigned Pompilia first,  
—Observe, if convertite, why, sinner then,  
Or what 's the pertinency of award?— 675  
And whither she was late returned to die,  
—Still in their jurisdiction, mark again!—  
That thrifty Sisterhood, for perquisite,  
Claims every paul whereof may die possessed  
Each sinner in the circuit of its walls. 680  
Now, this Pompilia seeing that, by death  
O' the couple, all their wealth devolved on her,  
Straight utilized the respite ere decease,  
By regular conveyance of the goods  
She thought her own, to will and to devise,— 685  
Gave all to friends, Tighetti and the like,  
In trust for him she held her son and heir,  
Gaetano,—trust to end with infancy :  
So willing and devising, since assured  
The justice of the Court would presently 690  
Confirm her in her rights and exculpate,  
Re-integrate and rehabilitate—  
Place her as, through my pleading, now she stands.  
But here 's the capital mistake : the Court  
Found Guido guilty,—but pronounced no word 695

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About the innocency of his wife :

I grounded charge on broader base, I hope !

No matter whether wife be true or false,

The husband must not push aside the law,

And punish of a sudden : that 's the point ! 700

Gather from out my speech the contrary !

It follows that Pompilia, unrelieved

By formal sentence from imputed fault,

Remains unfit to have and to dispose

Of property, which law provides shall lapse : 705

Wherefore the Monastery claims its due.

And whose, pray, whose the office, but the Fisc's ?

Who but I institute procedure next

Against the person of dishonest life,

Pompilia, whom last week I sainted so ? 710

I, it is, teach the monk what scripture means,

And that the tongue should prove a two-edged sword,

No axe sharp one side, blunt the other way,

Like what amused the town at Guido's cost !

*Astraea redux* ! I 've a second chance 715

Before the self-same Court o' the Governor

Who soon shall see volte-face and chop, change sides !

Accordingly, I charge you on your life,

Send me with all despatch the judgment late

---

O' the Florence Rota Court, confirmative 720

O' the prior judgment at Arezzo, clenched

Again by the Granducal signature,

Wherein Pompilia is convicted, doomed,

And only destined to escape through flight

The proper punishment. Send me the peace,— 725

I 'll work it! And this foul-mouthed friar shall find

His Noah's-dove that brought the olive back,

Turn into quite the other sooty scout,

'The raven, Noah first of all put forth the ark,

Which never came back, but ate carcasses! 730

No adequate machinery in law?

No power of life and death i' the learned tongue?

Methinks I am already at my speech,

Startle the world with "Thou, Pompilia, thus?

"How is the fine gold of the Temple dim!" 735

And so forth. But the courier bids me close,

And clip away one joke that runs through Rome,

Side by side with the sermon which I send.

How like the heartlessness of the old hunks

Arcangeli! His Count is hardly cold, 740

The client whom his blunders sacrificed,

When somebody must needs describe the scene—

How the procession ended at the church

That boasts the famous relic : quoth our brute,  
“ Why, that’s just Martial’s phrase for ‘ make an end ’—  
“ *Ad umbilicum sic perventum est !*” 746  
The callous dog,—let who will cut off head,  
He cuts a joke, and cares no more than so !  
I think my speech shall modify his mirth :  
“ How is the fine gold dim ! ”—but send the piece ! 750

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Alack, Bottini, what is my next word  
But death to all that hope ? The Instrument  
Is plain before me, print that ends my Book  
With the definitive verdict of the Court,  
Dated September, six months afterward, 755  
(Such trouble and so long, the old Pope gave !)  
“ In restitution of the perfect fame  
“ Of dead Pompilia, *quondam* Guido’s wife,  
“ And warrant to her representative  
“ Domenico Tighetti, barred hereby, 760  
“ While doing duty in his guardianship,  
“ From all molesting, all disquietude,  
“ Each perturbation and vexation brought  
“ Or threatened to be brought against the heir

---

“ By the Most Venerable Convent called 765  
 “ Saint Mary Magdalen o’ the Convertites  
 “ I’ the Corso.”

Justice done a second time !

Well judged, Marc Antony, *Locum-tenens*  
 O’ the Governor, a Venturini too ! 770  
 For which I save thy name,—last of the list !

Next year but one, completing his nine years  
 Of rule in Rome, died Innocent my Pope  
 — By some account, on his accession-day.  
 If he thought doubt would do the next age good, 775  
 ’T is pity he died unapprised what birth  
 His reign may boast of, be remembered by—  
 Terrible Pope, too, of a kind,—Voltaire.

And so an end of all i’ the story. Strain  
 Never so much my eyes, I miss the mark 780  
 If lived or died that Gaëtano, child  
 Of Guido and Pompilia : only find,  
 Immediately upon his father’s death,  
 A record, in the annals of the town—  
 That Porzia, sister of our Guido, moved 785  
 The Priors of Arezzo and their head



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Its Gonfalonier to give loyally  
A public attestation of the right  
O' the Franceschini to all reverence—  
Apparently because of the incident 790  
O' the murder,—there's no mention made o' the crime,  
But what else could have caused such urgency  
To cure the mob, just then, of greediness  
For scandal, love of lying vanity,  
And appetite to swallow crude reports 795  
That bring annoyance to their betters?—bane  
Which, here, was promptly met by antidote.  
I like and shall translate the eloquence  
Of nearly the worst Latin ever writ :  
“ Since antique time whereof the memory 800  
“ Holds the beginning, to this present hour,  
“ The Franceschini ever shone, and shine,  
“ Still i' the primary rank, supreme amid  
“ The lustres of Arezzo, proud to own  
“ In this great family, the flag-bearer, 805  
“ Guide of her steps and guardian against foe,—  
“ As in the first beginning, so to-day !”  
There, would you disbelieve the annalist,  
Go rather by the babble of a bard ?  
I thought, Arezzo, thou hadst fitter souls, 810

Petrarch,—nay, Buonarroti at a pinch,  
To do thee credit as *vexillifer* !  
Was it mere mirth the Patavinian meant,  
Making thee out, in his veracious page,  
Founded by Janus of the Double Face? 815

Well, proving of such perfect parentage,  
Our Gaetano, born of love and hate,  
Did the babe live or die?—I fain would find !  
What were his fancies if he grew a man?  
Was he proud,—a true scion of the stock 820  
Which bore the blazon, shall make bright my page—  
Shield, Azure, on a Triple Mountain, Or,  
A Palm-tree, Proper, whereunto is tied  
A Greyhound, Rampant, striving in the slips?  
Or did he love his mother, the base born, 825  
And fight i' the ranks, unnoticed by the world?

Such, then, the final state o' the story. So  
Did the Star Wormwood in a blazing fall  
Frighten awhile the waters and lie lost :  
So did this old woe fade from memory. 830  
Till after, in the fulness of the days,  
I needs must find an ember yet unquench'd,

And, breathing, blow the spark to flame. It lives,  
If precious be the soul of man to man.

So, British Public, who may like me yet, 835  
(Marry and amen !) learn one lesson hence  
Of many which whatever lives should teach :  
This lesson, that our human speech is naught,  
Our human testimony false, our fame  
And human estimation words and wind. 840  
Why take the artistic way to prove so much ?  
Because, it is the glory and good of Art,  
That Art remains the one way possible  
Of speaking truth, to mouths like mine, at least.  
How look a brother in the face and say 845  
“ Thy right is wrong, eyes hast thou yet art blind,  
“ Thine ears are stuffed and stopped, despite their length :  
“ And, oh, the foolishness thou countest faith ! ”  
Say this as silverly as tongue can troll—  
The anger of the man may be endured, 850  
The shrug, the disappointed eyes of him  
Are not so bad to bear—but here’s the plague  
That all this trouble comes of telling truth,  
Which truth, by when it reaches him, looks false,  
Seems to be just the thing it would supplant, 855

Nor recognizable by whom it left :  
While falsehood would have done the work of truth.  
But Art,—wherein man nowise speaks to men,  
Only to mankind,—Art may tell a truth  
Obliquely, do the thing shall breed the thought, 860  
Nor wrong the thought, missing the mediate word.  
So may you paint your picture, twice show truth,  
Beyond mere imagery on the wall,—  
So, note by note, bring music from your mind,  
Deeper than ever the Andante dived,— 865  
So write a book shall mean, beyond the facts,  
Suffice the eye and save the soul beside.

And save the soul ! If this intent save mine,—  
If the rough ore be rounded to a ring,  
Render all duty which good ring should do, 870  
And, failing grace, succeed in guardianship,—  
Might mine but lie outside thine, Lyric Love,  
Thy rare gold ring of verse (the poet praised)  
Linking our England to his Italy !

THE END.

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